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VOLTAIRE

VOLTAIRE

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BY

COLONEL HAMLEY

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THE translations here given, prose and verse, are by the writer of the present Volume.

VOLTAIRE.

THE YOUTH OF VOLTAIRE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS BOYHOOD.

In his own time, the idea of Voltaire which had possession of the English mind was formed chiefly from the attacks that he directed against religion. He was regarded as a malignant spirit, subversive and destructive; a mocker at things sacred, things serious, and generally all things good. Johnson, in a conversation with Boswell, probably did not much exaggerate the prejudice against him. "Rousseau, sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations." "Sir, do you think him as bad a man as Voltaire?" inquired Boswell. "Why, sir," returned the Doctor, "it is difficult to settle

the proportion of iniquity between them." Sir Joshua, in an allegorical portrait of Dr Beattie, introduced Voltaire as the personification of Sophistry. He was the helot of innumerable homilies, and served to point innumerable morals. When the Revolution came, Voltaire—considered as having been a main cause of the state of public feeling in France which produced that infinite convulsion—was also, though then many years in his grave, held responsible for its excesses and its crimes. Thus it is that what memory of him was left among us till within this last generation, was the reflection of the fleering, shallow scoffer, the literary Mephistopheles, whom our fathers had learned to detest.

But all this time his reputation in his own country (except with his enemies the clergy) was of a kind altogether different. The works which first made him famous were, if not orthodox, far from irreligious; and any signs of hostility to the authority either of Church or State which might be found in them, were such as Englishmen might be expected to sympathise with, for the objects of that hostility were superstition, fanaticism, and tyranny. The state of things, however, against which he contended, did not exist in England. With the degree of freedom of thought to which we had then attained, and which contented the nation, we, all through George III.'s reign, feared tyranny less than licence, and superstition less than free-thinking. Deism was in disgrace: it threw a dark shadow on the repute of writers of the highest rank, such as Hume and Gibbon; and to lesser men the imputation of it was extinction. In these days opinion, far more tolerant, would probably not be very severe on Voltaire; for while his

theistic views in some measure anticipated those of Mr Mill, he went by no means so far as that philosopher in doubt and denial. But as time went on, and his hostility to the priesthood became more and more strongly pronounced, his mode of impressing and reiterating his opinions was such as to render them specially obnoxious; and in this country he was, and has continued to be, chiefly a name of evil import.

The prejudice thus created extended to all the works of Voltaire. Few of his multifarious writings have been translated into English; and none of these, as a translation, has become much known among us. But in France he was famous not only as the most extraordinary man of letters that the nation could boast, of a versatility absolutely unbounded, a miracle of productiveness, and unrivalled in expression; beyond all this, he was regarded, with a gratitude which cast a reflected lustre on his writings, as the champion of freedom of thought. That thought had come to need a liberator was owing to the peculiar conditions of the French monarchy. With the accession of Louis XIV., the disputes between Crown and Parliament, and the power of that assembly, had come to an end. The young king did not forget the humiliations and privations to which it had compelled him to submit in the days of the Fronde. On the first occasion when, after his consecration, the Parliament attempted to discuss some of his edicts, he appeared before it in hunting-dress with a whip in his hand, and ordered the debate to cease. Henceforward the business of the Parliament was to register his decrees. He was absolute—the liberty and lives of the highest dignitaries of the kingdom were at his disposal; it was

no idle boast when he said, "The State!—I am the State." For a long time his autocracy went on amidst the applause of the nation. He began his reign with the advantage of succeeding, as a native prince, to a foreign queen who was governed by a foreign minister. His magnificence delighted the Parisians—his successes in war gratified the people—he carried the art of royalty to an extreme of elaboration never reached before or since; while, to give solidity to these elements of popularity, he possessed a talent for public business, for choosing able ministers and generals, for conferring favours with majestic benignity, and for giving splendid encouragement to literature and art. All these circumstances combined to hedge him with a divinity beyond that of an ordinary king. The loyalty which had been evinced for his illustrious grandfather by such men as Sully, Mornay, and Crillon, became for him the most abject servility. The French Academy submitted for his approval as the subject of its prize essay, "Which of all the king's virtues is the one that deserves the preference?" The greatest nobles of the kingdom intrigued and quarrelled for the honour of attending his going to bed and his rising, of handing the royal shirt and the royal periwig. The sultana of the period was an enormous power in the State. The most eloquent preachers suspended for him their code of morality. Thus it was not only without opposition, but with abject acquiescence, that the nation looked on while he set up and pulled down ministers of state, made war and conducted foreign relations for his personal objects, taxed the people for his magnificent expenses, and disposed at will of the public revenues.

Up to a certain period of his reign he and his people

remained in this perfect accord. They liked a strong master—they liked to see him magnificent, imperious, patronising arts and letters, and successful in war. But there came a time when, in ceasing to be magnificent and successful, he ceased also to be popular. He fell under the influence of a female devotee and of the priests. His armies were beaten, his conquests were lost, his Court became a scene of fanaticism, hypocrisy, and gloom. The king was getting old; he wished to make peace with heaven, probably for the same reason which induced him to wish to make peace on earth, because he found a difficulty in carrying on the war any longer. His repentance was to a great extent of that vicarious kind which exacts a rigid respect for religion from other people; he became very particular respecting the orthodoxy of his subjects, especially of those about his person—a requirement which by no means tended to render either gaiety or sincerity a distinguishing feature of society at Versailles. Relying much on the faith of others, he trusted to himself for good works, and commenced a system of religious persecution. His minister, Louvois, issued orders for the infliction of "the last rigours" on those who were not "of his Majesty's religion." These were faithfully executed. Fifty thousand Protestant families were driven from France, taking with them much of its prosperity. The Jesuits, under the influence of Madame de Maintenon and of the king's confessors, were all-powerful; and the suppression of heresy, and with it of all freedom of thought, became a chief business of the Government. This state of things was not, of course, pleasing to the French, who, indeed, were in the lowest stage of misery from the enormous taxes, which were the

result of constant extravagance and war; but so powerful was the habit of submission, acquired in a reign already of unusual length, and so imposing the authority and the personal bearing of the old monarch, that, though the people manifested a natural if somewhat indecent joy when he died in 1715, he remained to the last every inch a king.

It was in this priest-ridden phase of his reign that Voltaire's boyhood was passed. He was born in 1694, the second son of M. François Arouet, "who," says St Simon, the famous chronicler of the time, "was notary to my father, to whom I have often seen him bring papers to sign." M. Arouet lived in Paris, with a country house at Chatenay, a few miles from the capital. When François Arouet (Voltaire) was about ten he was sent to the College (now Lycée) Louis le Grand, in the Rue St Jacques, where he was educated for the law. The boarders, of whom he was one, numbered among them youths of the best families in the country, and he formed friendships here which proved constant and serviceable. Although the Jesuits took extreme care to select the best men that the Order could produce to conduct the educational course of this the chief of their colleges, yet the training did not satisfy Voltaire, who long afterwards, when the Jesuits were suppressed in France, gave a satirical account of it in the dialogue between an ex-Jesuit and a former pupil. Much more than the needful time was, he says, taken up in learning the classics, because the method was so faulty. Mathematics, history, geography, philosophy, were altogether neglected. Nevertheless, he was taught the classics well; and he omits, in the satirical dialogue, to mention the

important fact (which he has recorded elsewhere) that he received a thorough grounding in his own language from the man, of all others, the best qualified to impart it. This was the Abbé d'Olivet, to whose praise he devoted a paragraph of his 'Age of Louis XIV.' He was a member of the French Academy, and its historian. "We owe him," says Voltaire, "the most elegant and faithful translations of Cicero's works, enriched with judicious remarks. He spoke his own tongue with the same purity as Cicero spoke his, and did good service to French grammar by the most refined and accurate comments." François's own tastes in composition at this time led him to make verses, some of which, written at about the age of twelve, were notable enough to be talked of in the drawing-room of the famous Ninon de Lenclos, whose perennial charms had then been worshipped by many generations of lovers. François's godfather was the Abbé de Chateauneuf, who had long been the intimate friend of Ninon: it was he who brought the youthful poet to make his bow to the venerable fair one, then ninety, and her charms, presumably, a little on the wane. She was so pleased with the boy (who possibly made love to her), that, dying soon after, she left him two thousand francs to buy books.

He remained altogether seven years at the college, and in the later period of his residence came under another instructor, Father Porée, whom he considered worthy of a niche in history. "He was," says the notice of him in the 'Age of Louis XIV.,' "one of the few professors who have had repute amongst men of the world—eloquent in the style of Seneca, a poet, and of a very fine intellect. His greatest merit was that he made

his disciples love both literature and virtue." "The hours of his lessons," he says elsewhere, "were for us delicious hours; and I could have wished that it had been the custom in Paris, as in Athens, for those of all ages to share such lessons. I should have returned often to hear him." Whatever it may have afterwards pleased Voltaire to say about the college, it is clear that he was exceptionally fortunate in the instructors whom it gave to him. Contact with such minds must have been invaluable to an intellect so eager and so assimilative as his. He left the college at seventeen with a high reputation, especially for his poetic gifts.

CHAPTER II.

HE STARTS IN LIFE.

His father destined him for the bar, and with that prospect he was set for three years to study law. He found the subject, or the mode of teaching it, entirely distasteful. "What most strengthened his inclination for poetry was his disgust at the mode in which jurisprudence was taught in the law schools, to which, on leaving college, he was sent by his father, then treasurer of the Chamber of Accounts. This alone sufficed to turn him aside to the study of the *belles lettres*. Young as he was, he was admitted into the society of the Marquis de la Fare, the Duc de Sully, the Abbé Courtin, . . . and his father thought him lost because he mixed with good society and wrote verses." So he says in the 'Commentaire Historique,' an autobiographical production of his old age. He certainly possessed the most remarkable qualifications for social success. His readiness in the use of his singular mental endowments, his wit, aptitude of expression, confidence, animation, and good-humoured malice, were all prefaced for success by the charm of his manner. Madame de Genlis (no friendly critic) allows that he alone of the men of his century

possessed the lost art of talking to women as women love to be talked to. A portrait painted by Largillière when Voltaire was about twenty-four, shows him, says his eulogist Houssaye, "full of grace and spirit, with a mocking mouth, refined profile, the air of a gentleman; a luminous forehead, a fine hand in a fine ruffle." The print in the quarto edition of his works, from a later portrait, confirms this description: there is extraordinary spirit and animation in the eyes and semi-cynical yet bright and good-humoured smile. His rather tall figure was uncommonly thin. The Duchess of Berry called him "that wicked mummy;" but then the Duchess had reasons for taking an unfriendly view of him. But despite his meagreness, no young man of that day was so qualified to give what was specially demanded by the society of the *salons*. The social success of the notary's son was remarkable. "We are all princes and poets here," he observed one day at table; yet amid such enjoyments and distractions he found time for the acquisition of uncommonly varied knowledge, and for planning works which made him famous.

The pieces of verse which he wrote at this time are all distinguished by his peculiar grace, and are still read with pleasure. He addresses one of these epistles to the Comtesse de Fontaine; another to Madame de Montbrun-Villefranche; another to the Duc de la Feuillade, so dreadfully caustic that he can hardly be supposed to have confided it to that nobleman, especially as we afterwards find the satirist a visitor at his chateau. Prince Eugene, George I., and Cardinal Dubois are all, at this time, the objects of his poetical addresses. What is very notable is the number and the character of the

clergymen with whom he associated while almost a boy. The Abbé Servien, uncle of the Duke of Sully, is described by St Simon as one of the most agreeable of men, but so dissolute that nobody of repute would have anything to do with him, which did not prevent Voltaire from being a great friend of his. The Abbé was imprisoned in Vincennes in 1714 for some disrespectful pleasantry about the king; and Voltaire, one of whose conspicuous virtues was constancy to friends in distress, addressed to him a long poem, complimenting him as an eminent man of pleasure, and exhorting him to keep up his spirits. Unfortunately the Abbé had not much time in which to profit by his young friend's counsels, for he died the following year. A still more singular epistle to be addressed to a divine is that "To M. l'Abbé de ——, who bewailed the Death of his Mistress." It begins thus:—

"You who in Pleasure's courts did once preside,
Dear Abbé, languish now in sore distress;
That jolly threefold chin, your chapter's pride,
Will soon be two folds less.
O slave! to earth by sorrow bent,
You spurn the feast before you placed,
You fast like any penitent;—
Was ever canon so disgraced?"

and after much remonstrance on the inutility and folly of his grief, and a glance at the "constancy of a churchman's love," ends by advising him to take refuge from sadness in the arms of pleasure. The Abbé Chaulieu, another friend, nearly eighty, was a poet, a voluptuary, and a sceptic. The Abbé Desfontaines, a later acquaintance, befriended by Voltaire, was much worse than any

of them. The society and example of these ecclesiastics must have had more influence than the companionship of a thousand fashionable young scoffers. Another of his youthful epistles is "To a Lady, a little Worldly and too Devout." It begins by telling her that when she had left the arms of sleep and the eye of day had looked on her charms, soft-hearted Love appeared, who, kissing her hands and bathing them with tears, remonstrated with her, in the prettiest terms, on the ingratitude with which, after all his gifts to her, she was in the habit of turning from him with disdain to read the sermons of Massillon and Bourdaloue. He (Love) exhorts her to give youth to pleasure, to keep wisdom for age, and the piece ends thus:—

"So spake the god; and even while he wooed,
Perchance thy softening heart had owned his sway,
But at thy bedside on a sudden stood
The reverend Père Quinquet.
That holy rival's threatening air
Told Love he must not hope to gain
Thee, cold, incorrigible fair;
And, weary of remonstrance vain,
He dried the pleading tears, so useless now,
And flew to Paris, where his power's assured,
To seek for beauties easier lured,
Though far less loveable than thou."

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE REGENCY.

When he was twenty-one a great change occurred with the death of the old king. It would be curious to speculate what Voltaire might have become had Louis died at eighty-seven instead of at seventy-seven. The gloom of the Court extended over the literature as well as over the mind and manners of France. It deepened as the king grew older and more devout: his confessor, Letellier, a morose and cruel bigot, urged him to fresh persecutions; it was the Jansenists (a sect into whose peculiar Calvinistic tenets, founded on distinctions which would hardly now appear rational or intelligible, it is not needful here to inquire) who were then the objects of the fury of the Jesuits, and the prisons were full of them. All literary works which appeared at this time had a tinge of devotion, and free-thinking would have been the most perilous of modes of thought. In these circumstances, Madame de Maintenon might have set Voltaire, as she had formerly set Racine, to compose Scriptural dramas for the religious improvement of the courtly audience; and had he complied, he would have been guilty of no more hypocrisy than many around

him were practising daily. The spectacle of a gloomy and intolerant bigotry, enforced by a sanctimonious old king, by the widow of Scarron, and by the fanatics who had charge of what the pair believed to be their consciences, had brought religion itself into discredit, and infidelity was not only common but matter of boast in the highest Parisian society.

Unapproachable in profligacy and irreligion—*facile princeps*—was the Duke of Orleans, the king's nephew, and the destined Regent. Accordingly, when Louis vanished from the scene, such a change took place at Court as is only to be seen in a pantomime, when the gloomy cavern of some fell enchanter, with its dismal incantations and supernatural tenants, suddenly becomes a palace of glory, inhabited by gauze-clad nymphs, with harlequin and columbine figuring in the foreground. Vice, says Burke, loses half its evil by losing all its grossness. At the Court of the Regent it underwent no such diminution, and in this respect the change of rulers was much for the worse. The early part of Louis's reign had been by no means remarkable for morality, but it had always been distinguished by decorum. Perhaps the best and most enduring result of that reign was the amelioration in manners which it diffused far beyond the boundaries of France. The flowing courtesy, the refined address, the consideration for others, which Sterne, in the next century, found alike in peasant, shopkeeper, and noble, had their source in the splendid Court where the stately and gracious king was for so long the glass of fashion. The gilded youth of the time ceased to haunt taverns, ceased to brawl in the streets and fight duels, and vied with each other in deference to women. It was

out of these conditions that sprang also the felicity and fineness of wit so characteristic of Voltaire, and which could hardly have been the product of a different age. The weapons were pointed in the old period with which he became the champion of the opinions of the new. But it is obviously an error to impute to Voltaire that he was the originator of unchristian opinion in France. What he did was to give expression to the thoughts which prevailed all round him—to say effectively what so many were wishing should be said. The systematic suppression of opinion, the senseless dogmatism, the persecutions, the evil example of the clergy, the sanctimoniousness of the Court, had combined to create those elements which broke out in a revolt against Christianity.

But although the new Court was licentious beyond example, the old machinery of despotism and fanaticism still remained in full force. The Bastille, the orders for consignment to it, the power and intolerance of the clergy, the Order of Jesuits—all were as they had been; and the press continued to be under the strictest and most oppressive supervision.

We know that in England at that time patrons might make or mar an author, and men even of established character thought it well to propitiate them. But in France the avenues to literary fame were still more difficult of access. "There are," says Voltaire in a letter of advice to a young aspirant, to whom he is evidently imparting his own experience, "a great number of small social circles in Paris where some woman always presides, who in the decline of her beauty reveals the dawn of her intellect. One or two men of letters are the prime ministers of this little kingdom. If you neglect to be in

the ranks of the courtiers you are in those of the enemy, and you will be crushed." Something of the kind happened to Voltaire. Among the country houses at which he often visited was that of the Duke of Maine, at Sceaux, near M. Arouet's country house of Chatenay. The Duke was the eldest legitimised son of Louis XIV. by Madame de Montespan, and important enough therefore, as a possible successor to the throne, to be a rival of the Duke of Orleans; his wife was active and ambitious, and hence Sceaux became a focus of intrigue, and the Duchess's friends objects of suspicion to the Government. From her party issued many satirical attacks upon the Regent, and it was natural that some of these should be attributed to Voltaire; among others, one that has survived on account of the vogue it had, known as "Things that I have seen," in which the writer enumerates some of the chief evils of the late reign: "I have seen a thousand prisons full of brave citizens and faithful subjects; I have seen the people groaning in slavery, the soldiers famishing," &c., &c. — "and yet I am not twenty." Voltaire always strenuously denied all knowledge of the composition, the most unfortunate passage in which was that where D'Argenson, the Minister of Police, was called "an enemy of the human race." He was placed under observation by the official thus unpleasantly designated; and when, a few months later, some squibs against not only the Regent, but his daughter, the Duchess of Berry, came out, he was exiled from Paris, being allowed the indulgence of choosing his place of abode. The Duke of Sully's chateau, on the Loire, had been the home of Henry IV.'s famous minister, and was full of recollections of both him and his master, and

this was the seat to which he was welcomed. Voltaire's interest in Henry, which had such important results, was greatly heightened by another visit he paid in this year (1717) to M. de Caumartin, a high public functionary, at his chateau. This old gentleman possessed a most remarkable memory, stored with traditions of the French Court which went back to the times of the League, his forefathers for several generations having held important public offices, and his great-grandfather having been in the personal service of Henry. "Voltaire was carried away" (says his Autobiography) "by all that M. de Caumartin, very deeply versed in history, told him of Henri Quatre, of whom that venerable gentleman was an idolator; and he began the 'Henriade' through pure enthusiasm, and almost without thinking what he was about."

During his stay in the country he endeavoured to soften the Regent by addressing a poetical epistle to him, in which flattery was not spared. It began thus:—

> "O Prince, beloved of gods! who art to-day
> A father to thy king, thy people's stay;
> Thou who the weight of State upbear'st alone,
> For our fair land's repose give up thine own"—

and ends by an appeal for pity on his "oppressed youth."

After a time Voltaire, with or without permission, returned to Paris, where D'Argenson's spies found fresh matter for report against him, and this time he was committed to the Bastille. He has left a versified account of his entrapment and lodgment in the fortress. The official who arrests him thus addresses him:—

"My son, the court your merit knows,
Your every phrase with genius glows,
Your scraps of verse, your love-songs gay;
And, as all work deserves its pay,
The king, my son, with grateful heart,
Will make your recompense his part;
And so you'll be, without expense,
Lodged in a royal residence."

In reply to his remonstrances, the escort take him by the hand and conduct him to his prison, dark and with walls ten feet thick, where he is put under triple bolts.

"The clock strikes noon: a tray is brought,
With humble, frugal cheer 'tis fraught;
Said they who bore it, when my air
Showed no great relish for the fare,
'Your diet is for health, not pleasure;
Pray eat in peace—you've ample leisure.'
See thus my fate distressful sealed—
Behold me cooped up, embastilled,
Sleep, food, and drink distasteful made;
By all, e'en by my love, betrayed."

Nor was this light way of viewing his misfortune assumed in retrospect only. Never did captive bear a better heart. All the joys of existence cut off, he employed himself, though denied pen and paper, in planning and partly composing the "Henriade," and in finishing his first tragedy, trusting the lines partly to his memory, partly to markings made somehow in a copy of Homer which he was allowed to have. After nearly eleven months imprisonment, he was permitted to return to Chatenay. It is said that a nobleman of the Court conducted him to an interview with the Regent. While Voltaire awaited the audience in the ante-chamber, a great storm broke over Paris.

"Things could not go on worse," he said aloud, looking at the sky, "if there was a Regency up there." His conductor, introducing him to the Regent, said, repeating the remark which the irrepressible youth had then made, "I bring you a young man whom your Highness has just released from the Bastille, and whom you should send back again." The Regent laughed good-humouredly, and promised, if he behaved well, to provide for him. "I thank your Highness for taking charge of my board," returned Voltaire; "but I beseech you not to trouble yourself any more about my lodging." The prejudice against him softened before long: not only was he allowed to return to Paris, but his tragedy was acted before the Court, and the Duchess of Berry had so far forgiven "the wicked mummy" as to be present with her father at the first representation; while the Regent gave him a thousand crowns, and also a small pension.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS FIRST TRAGEDY.

THAT he chose a classical subject for his essay in tragedy was owing partly to the fashion set by Racine and Corneille, partly to his recent studies at the Jesuit College; and he chose this particular story because, as he tells us, he did not approve of the Œdipus either of Sophocles or of Corneille, and endeavoured in his own play to avoid the faults which they had committed. But it was a subject that no genius could make attractive in our day. To represent a good man as the sport of a malignant destiny is of itself an idea belonging to a pagan rather than a Christian age; and when his fate takes the shape of causing him unwittingly to slay his father and to marry his mother—bringing down, by these involuntary offences, the wrath of the gods upon a whole nation—the fable would seem to be altogether outside the pale of modern sympathies. Nevertheless the play, obstructed at first by critics who did not like Voltaire, on the score that it contained reflections against religion, and by the players because the characters did not suit them, especially as there was no "lady in love," ran for forty-five nights in succession.

Believing that the language of the drama (which, he held, should be the standard of linguistic excellence) had terribly degenerated, he set himself to render his play a model of correctness in all respects. It is framed in extreme accordance with the assumed exigencies of the unities. The story is very simple and direct, the time occupied in the action is the same as that of the representation, and the scene is throughout in the same palace or its precincts. In thus focussing the whole drama into a crisis in the lives of the characters, and making no demands on the imagination of the spectators to furnish anything except the epoch, the dramatist proceeds on the assumption that all the illusion which the stage can afford is not attained except under these conditions. This assumption has been proved false by a thousand examples. The writer who has succeeded in observing the unities, probably confounds his own satisfaction at overcoming a great difficulty with the pleasure of the audience, forgetting that the spectator is interested in the effect only, not in the process. However this may be, Voltaire continued to value himself on the observance of the rules with which he hampered his genius, and to allow his prejudices on this point to affect his estimate of others, notably of Shakespeare.

It is not expedient to dwell on the character of this drama further than to say that it exhibits great dexterity in securing symmetry, compactness, and completeness under the assumed conditions; and that, if the characters exhibit no great individuality, and speak rather to promote the action than to reveal themselves, they talk as well as characters so unhappily situated can be supposed to talk. But it may be interesting to quote one or two

short speeches which were considered to hint at his rebellion against priestcraft. They were so accepted by his enemies at the time, and his later writings lent to them fresh significance. Philoctetes makes Œdipus understand how dangerous is the enmity of the priesthood :—

> "If kings had been your only enemies,
> Then under you had Philoctetes fought;
> But when a weapon bears a sacred name,
> All the more fatal is the stab it deals.
> Strongly upborne by his vain oracles,
> A priest is oft to rulers terrible;
> And a besotted people, fired by zeal,
> Making an idol of its stupid creed,
> In pious disregard of higher laws,
> Honours its gods by treason to its kings."

Jocasta thus questions the authority of the oracle :—

> "Can it not err, this organ of the gods?
> A holy tie priests to the altar binds,
> Yet, commercing with gods, they are but men.
> Think you, indeed, the award of fate can hang
> Upon their seeking, or the flight of birds?
> That oxen, groaning under sacred steel,
> To curious eyes unveil our destinies?
> And that these victims, all in garlands decked,
> Within their entrails bear the doom of men?
> Not so. To seek in this way hidden truth
> Is to usurp the rights of power divine.
> Our priests, far other than dull crowds believe,
> Owe all their lore to our credulity."

These two last lines have often been quoted as indicating the revolt against religious belief which was then stirring in the mind of the dramatist. But what they

really prove is the extraordinary jealousy and intolerance which could find such a meaning in them.

There runs a tale, that at one of the performances of this play the Maréchale de Villars, the beautiful wife of Louis XIV.'s famous Marshal, observed a young man on the stage holding up the train of the high priest in such a way as to cast ridicule on the scene. Inquiring who this person was, who seemed to desire to ruin the play, she was told he was no other than the author; and, struck by his eccentricity and cleverness, she thereupon desired that he might be brought to her box and presented to her. This story, however, can scarcely be altogether true; for two of Voltaire's published letters which speak of visits he was about to pay at Villars, her country seat, are dated a year or two before. But however this may be, the fact remains that his friendship with this excellent pair, begun in his youth, ended only with their death. Indeed, it was something more than friendship on Voltaire's part, for the graces of the Maréchale inspired him with one of the two really ardent attachments of his youth. He appears to have imparted his passion for her (according to the laudable practice of the time) to everybody who would listen to him, including, possibly, the Marshal. As for the lady, she appears to have accorded him only so much indulgence as a veteran swordsman may bestow on a promising young fencer, letting him practise with her his airs and graces, his tender letters, verses, vows and entreaties, but never allowing him to come within her guard.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY SOCIAL AND LITERARY LIFE.

It was at this time he carried into effect a design which his recent misfortunes had inspired, and abandoning the name of Arouet, took that of Voltaire, thus adding a new adjective, *voltairien*, to the French language. Why he chose that particular name is an enigma not yet solved. One solution is, that it was the anagram of Arouet l. j. (*le jeune*); but, besides being so far-fetched, it is burthened with the improbability that he ever did so style himself. The theory that he adopted the name of a small estate in his mother's family would be much more plausible but for the circumstance that it could hardly have remained doubtful, yet has never been established, that there ever was such a place. Such changes of name were not uncommon, of which there are two notable examples—Molière's real name was Poquelin, and Montesquieu's was Secondat.

He tells us that he was at this time very poor, and lived, when left to his own resources, very frugally, but happily. Often he was not left to his own resources, for he tells a correspondent of those days that he passes his life from country house to country house.

It was in an interval between these visits, however, that he formed the second of the attachments before adverted to. Suzanne de Livry was a young girl who, desirous of being an actress, had sought the author of the successful tragedy in the hope of getting some good advice. Of this, in a professional sense, he gave her plenty, and instruction also; and in the course of the lessons, fell violently in love with his pupil, who appeared no less ardently to return the passion. It was for her his portrait was painted by Largillière, of which mention has been made. Possibly he might have married her, had she not run away with his particular friend, M. de Genonville. Voltaire was at first furious: he pursued the treacherous pair, but not overtaking them, had time to forgive them, though his despair made him seriously ill. He even wrote to De Genonville a poetical epistle, in which, while reproaching him, he expresses all his former attachment for him. This disloyal associate died a few years afterwards: by that time Suzanne had joined a company of strolling players, who extended their circuit as far as England. Their venture was unsuccessful, and Mademoiselle de Livry was living in great privation, when the Marquis de Gouvernet saw and fell in love with her. He proposed marriage, but Suzanne magnanimously refused him, on the score that she was penniless. Upon this he made her buy a lottery-ticket: it turned up a prize of several thousand pounds (supplied by the gallant lover, not by the lottery), and she became the Marquise de Gouvernet. This marriage did not take place till several years after the episode with Voltaire. She became a great lady, and took out of pawn Voltaire's portrait, which was

hung up in the Marquis's hotel, apparently as a family picture.

The eight years succeeding the performance of "Œdipus," though no doubt very profitably employed by Voltaire, were the least productive of his literary life. In 1720 he produced another tragedy—"Artémise;" next year a third—"Mariamne;" and, in 1725, his first and best comedy—"L'Indiscret." But it is remarkable that while his tragedies kept the stage so long, and have been held in so high esteem as works of art, this pre-eminently witty man of the world and skilful writer did not succeed in comedy. His most noticeable work of this period is a poem, "Le Pour et le Contre; ou, Epître à Uranie." The nymph to whom it was addressed was a Madame de Rupelmonde, his companion in a journey to Brussels. She had spiritual doubts (which she finally settled, St Simon says, by going into a convent), and she appealed to Voltaire to tell her what she ought to believe in. He shaped his reply into verse, first stating how the acts of the Deity of the Old Testament and the life of the Messiah of the New seemed to him inconsistent with the character of eternal powers; then he appeals to the Deity, as he imagines Him to be, "to listen to a voice sad and sincere"—"the insensate blasphemes Thee," he says, "while I—I revere Thee. . . . Believe, Uranie, that the everlasting wisdom of the Most High has graven in the depths of thy heart a natural religion. Know that before His throne, in all times, in all places, the heart of the just man is precious; know that a humble bonze, a benevolent dervish, will find grace in His eye sooner than a merciless Jansenist or an ambitious pontiff. What matters the title under

which we implore Him? He accepts all homage, but none can reflect honour on Him. The Almighty has no need of our officious care: if it is possible to offend Him, only unjust acts can do it. He will judge us by our virtues, and not by our sacrifices."

At Brussels, on this occasion, he met with a French poet, Jean Baptiste Rousseau,[1] with whom he had had some friendly correspondence; but their personal intercourse was not so happy, and produced a permanent hostility. Rousseau, in the pride of a poet's heart at meeting an appreciative listener, read to him a poem he had just finished, an "Ode to Posterity." Voltaire expressed a doubt "whether it would reach its address." Having delivered himself of this conciliatory witticism, he, being also actuated by the pride of a poet rather than by the prudence of a man of the world, chose that fortunate moment to recite his "Epistle to Uranie" to the injured bard. Rousseau, despising the fact that his own writings and his own life were both scandalous, begged to know why Voltaire had chosen him for the confidant of such impious views; and upon these uncomfortable terms the minstrels parted.

[1] Not to be confounded with Jean Jacques Rousseau of the "Héloise," &c.

CHAPTER VI.

IN EXILE.

HITHERTO Voltaire's literary reputation was altogether that of a poet, and his unorthodox opinions could only be surmised from the gossip of the society which he frequented; nor was scepticism at that time so uncommon as to render him who avowed it at all remarkable. But to avow it in society was one thing—to proclaim it in print another; the clergy were prompt and powerful to meet assailants, as he afterwards found, and as he then knew—for he did not venture to publish the "Epistle to Uranie" till some years afterwards, when, from the storm it helped to raise, he found it expedient to cause a rumour to be spread that its author was the Abbé Chaulieu, then dead, to whose memory the imputation of unorthodoxy could do no possible harm. And as a poet only, Voltaire might have continued to be known but for an incident which changed the current of his life and influence.

At the Duke of Sully's table one day a Chevalier de Rohan-Chabot—one of the great house of Rohan—making an insolent remark about Voltaire, received a sarcastic retort. It is to be hoped that his mode of avenging it

was such as the high society of the time did not approve. When Voltaire was again dining with the Duke a few days afterwards, he was induced to leave the table by a false message, and descending to the courtyard of the hotel, found there this Rohan-Chabot, who, having brought with him some ruffians armed with sticks, directed them to seize and chastise Voltaire. This accomplished, the party drove away. Burning with rage, the poet rushed back to the dining-room, and called on the Duke of Sully to take a host's part in avenging the outrage. But the Duke preferred to remain neutral (for which reason the name of his ancestor was expunged from the "Henriade," and that of Duplessis-Mornay substituted); and Voltaire, unable of himself to procure redress against a nobleman, challenged Rohan to fight, in terms that he could not evade. The bully, seeming to accept the challenge, made it known to his wife, and his friends obtained from the minister of the young king (the Regent had made a highly characteristic exit from the world in 1723) another order for Voltaire's committal to the Bastille. He remained there six months, and was only liberated on condition that he quitted France.

He chose England for his place of exile, and brought with him excellent introductions. Lord Bolingbroke, then in banishment, had married a French lady, and owned a beautiful place near Orleans—of a visit to which, and of its lord, Voltaire gives an enthusiastic account in a letter to Thiriot. Bolingbroke reciprocated the esteem, warmly praised "Œdipe" and the "Henriade," and recommended him to his friends. These and other such advantages, joined to his charming address and his wit, placed him in the best society of the time, which was the

last year of George I.'s reign. Only one letter remains descriptive of his impressions of the country, in which he describes what may have been Greenwich fair—a multitude of gay boats on the Thames escorting the king and queen, and horse-races and sports near the town of Greenwich, of which he gives the most appreciative and pleased account. He was extremely vexed to be told afterwards that there had been much illusion for him in the scene—that all the pretty girls were servants or villagers, all the brilliant youths caracoling about the course students or apprentices on hired horses. The same evening he was presented to some Court ladies, whom he found reserved and cold, taking tea, making a great noise with their fans, and either saying nothing or crying out all together in disparagement of somebody present. He takes a humorously exaggerated view of the effect of the east wind in producing moroseness and even suicide among the English, and says a famous doctor told him that the wind was in that quarter when Charles I.'s head was cut off, and when James II. was dethroned. "'If you have any favour to ask at Court,' he whispered in my ear, 'never urge it except when the wind is in the west or south.' . . . Besides this contrariness, the English have those which spring from the animosity of parties; and nothing puts a stranger out so much as this. I have heard it said, literally, that my Lord Marlborough was the greatest poltroon in the world, and that Mr Pope was a fool. I came here full of the notion that a Wigh was a refined Republican, enemy of royalty, and a Tory the partisan of passive obedience. But I find that in Parliament nearly all the Wighs are for the Court, and the Torys against it." . . .

"'I ask you if you think it easy to define a nation which cut off Charles I.'s head because he wished to introduce the surplice into Scotland, and demanded a tribute which the judges declared to belong to him; whilst the same nation, without a murmur, saw Cromwell drive out Parliament, lords and bishops, and upset all the laws. Understand that James II. was dethroned partly because he gave a place in a college to a Catholic pedant: and remember also that the sanguinary tyrant, Henry VIII., half Catholic, half Protestant, changed the religion of the country because he wished to marry a brazen woman whom he afterwards sent to the scaffold; that he wrote a bad book against Luther in favour of the Pope, and then made himself Pope in England, hanging those who denied his supremacy, and burning those who did not believe in transubstantiation—and all this with gaiety and impunity. A spirit of enthusiasm, a furious superstition, had seized the nation during the civil wars: a soft and lazy irreligion succeeded these troublous times under Charles II. So everything changes and seems to contradict itself. What is truth at one time is error at another. The Spaniards say of a man, 'He was brave yesterday.' It is something in this way we must judge nations, the English in particular: we must say, 'They were of such a mind in this year, in this month.'"

With his usual energy, Voltaire, immediately on coming to England, set himself to learn our language, which he was considered to have mastered, though the proper names seem to have been something of a stumbling-block: the "Wighs and the Torys" are not his only confusions of this kind; Sir John Vanbrugh, having a foreign name, may excusably be represented as the

"Chevalier Wanbruck;" but our historical Admiral Drake need not have become "Dracke;" and the identity of a celebrated actress, whom he addresses in verse, is almost lost when he apostrophises her as "Ofilds;" nor is the matter rendered much clearer when she reappears as "Ophils." However, he felt so sure of his footing in our tongue that he wrote in it some acts of his tragedy of "Brutus."

He stayed nearly two years in England (living during part of the time in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, and during another part at Wandsworth), but no mention of his visit is to be found in contemporary records. Almost the only anecdote respecting it that has come down to us is the well-known one of his visit to Congreve. When Voltaire told him of the desire he had felt to converse with so famous a dramatist, Congreve intimated that he preferred to be visited as a private gentleman. "If you were nothing but that," said Voltaire, "I should never have come to see you." For three months he was the guest of the famous Lord Peterborough. His intimacy with Bolingbroke procured for him the acquaintance of Pope, with whom he had before maintained a correspondence. In a passage of the 'Age of Louis XIV.,' correcting an error about Pope, he says, "I had lived a whole year with Pope." This can only mean near Pope, and in the habit of seeing him. It is somewhat remarkable that in all Pope's correspondence of those years, with men to whom Voltaire was probably known, and who would certainly have received news of him with interest, there is no mention of personal acquaintance with the French poet. Voltaire not only read critically the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Butler, Swift, and Pope,

but was the first to introduce them to French readers. England appeared to him as at once the land of reason and the paradise of men of letters. He was never tired of telling how posts in the State had been conferred on Prior and Addison, and how Newton and Pope were held in higher esteem than the king's ministers. He was convinced that among the chief results of the liberty of thought which prevailed among us were the advances made in philosophy and science by Locke and Newton. He studied and criticised the works of Locke, and became a chief exponent of the theories of Newton, whom he never mentioned but with reverence. But it was from the number of sceptical English philosophers, who had set up natural against revealed religion, that he received the impulse which may be regarded as forming a main influence in the rest of his career. It is true he was already a professed disciple of natural religion. But it was one thing to hold opinions in common with the abbés and rakes among whom he lived in Paris, and another to find those opinions gravely maintained by philosophers. Hitherto his shafts against Christianity had been mere jests; he now gathered the means of reinforcing them with facts and arguments. Shaftesbury (whose opinions he recognised again as versified by Pope), Bolingbroke, Toland, Collins, Wollaston, Chubb, formed the school in which his deism was confirmed and rendered aggressive.

But the main influence which England exercised on him was through its general atmosphere of free thought. From the standpoint of these shores tyranny of all sorts in France wore a new aspect. There he had only dreamed of what a country might be if relieved from the

domination of priests and despots; here he saw what it was. Liberty was no longer an idea, but a fact; and thenceforth superstition, oppression, and ignorance were the "Gorgons and Hydras and Chimæras dire" against which he vowed to wage perpetual war.

Of this, and other important epochs of his early life, there remain but scanty records. When he grew famous, his letters became cherished possessions; but at this time very few had been preserved. An indefatigable letter-writer, with many correspondents to whom he could without reserve impart his projects, his opinions, and his affairs, abundant material for this part of his biography no doubt once existed, and in no scattered hands. He was more than commonly constant to his early friendships, and held sustained correspondence with the objects of them. Cideville, an advocate at Rouen, had been Voltaire's schoolfellow. Thiriot had become known to him when both were studying for the bar. Voltaire made him a sort of agent; and while the poet was in England, Thiriot, receiving on his behalf subscriptions for the English edition of the "Henriade," seems to have appropriated them to his own use. Nevertheless Voltaire forgave this injury, as he had done the treason of Genonville, and often befriended Thiriot, with whom his intimacy continued until that associate's death in 1772. Concluding a letter to M. de Formont, another Rouen friend of his youth, he says, "I embrace you with all my heart, and count myself something more than your very humble servant, for I am your friend, and tenderly attached to you for all my life." D'Argenson, son of the Police Minister, was another schoolfellow; the young Count D'Argental, another advocate, was also a friend

of his youth. These, and the fine old warrior Villars, were the young poet's trusted correspondents, not to mention the many ladies whom he favoured with his confidence; and he used to write in most respectful and affectionate terms to the Jesuit Fathers who had been his instructors.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HENRIADE.

This seems the proper place for noticing his renowned poem, the "Henriade;" for though it had been finished some years, he was constantly retouching it, and now for the first time gave openly an edition to the world. One had been clandestinely printed, smuggled into Paris, and sold in 1724, by Voltaire himself—the official sanction, without which a book could not openly be published, having been refused. A piratical one had also appeared, published by that miracle of baseness the Abbé Desfontaines, who, after acknowledging, with servile protestations of gratitude, the deepest obligations to Voltaire, made it his constant business for years to vituperate him, and had caused the "Henriade" to be reprinted on his own account, adorned with passages of his own composition. It was to this scoundrel that a well-known retort was made. Excusing himself to the Minister of Police for one of his libels on Voltaire, he said, "I must live, you know." "I do not see the necessity," replied the Minister.

The number and importance of Voltaire's English friends enabled him to publish a quarto edition of his

poem in England with uncommon success. It was dedicated to the queen; and the subscription, headed by the Princess Caroline, amounted to about two thousand pounds. This sum, it has been said and repeated by biographers, became, judiciously invested, the foundation of his fortune.

The great epics of the world may be counted on the fingers, and among these is the "Henriade." It was from the first hailed as the worthy representative of France in that very select assembly. The world of letters, and the most fastidious critics, agreed in recognising it as an extraordinary production, which placed its author among the first poets of his time. So greatly did Frederick of Prussia admire the "Henriade," that he took considerable pains to procure the publication of an elaborately-illustrated edition of it, which was never completed, but for which he wrote a preface, generally published with the poem, expressing his enthusiastic delight in the work and unbounded respect for its author. Much as the taste of the French people in poetry has changed since then, it continues to command high esteem as a principal modern classic, and to be issued in cheap editions.

Along with it Voltaire published essays on epic poetry, and on the most illustrious representatives of that province of song. In these, while distinguishing and allowing for the differences of national tastes, he censures renowned poets evidently with thorough honesty, but with more freedom than common opinion warrants: he finds Homer very imperfect in point of art, and accuses Milton of a great number of gross faults, as, for instance, the speech of Sin, the portress of Hell, which he calls "a disgusting and abominable history." He quotes passages

from epics in various languages which, in his opinion, however justly admired, would not be tolerated in French poetry. Homer's deities, intoxicating themselves with nectar, and laughing immoderately at Vulcan's awkwardness, would, he tells us, no more be admissible in a modern French epic than Virgil's harpies carrying off the dinner. He notes Milton's expression "darkness visible" as a liberty which may be excused, "but French exactitude admits nothing that needs excuse." Besides this exactitude, he claims for French writers clearness and elegance: to them, he says, "the force of the English appears gigantic and monstrous on the one hand, and the sweetness of the Italians effeminate on the other." These and other passages of his essays greatly help foreigners to appreciate the "Henriade," which, like all his writings, possesses in the highest degree the characteristics that he thus attributes to the national poetry. We must expect here no vague sublimity of effect, no pregnant or allusive epithets, none of the homely reality which would be imparted by such familiar touches as would be deemed vulgar in a serious French poem—and to which he so gravely objects in Homer and Shakespeare—and none of the involuntary strokes which paint the manners of an age. Excellent sense, conveyed in the most perfect form of expression, a vigour and confidence which prevent him from ever falling ignominiously beneath the height to which his argument may conduct him, and the completeness with which he has overcome the exceptional difficulties of French verse, form the chief elements of his success.

Fired with the audacity of a young man who is conscious of splendid powers and wants to make them felt,

he appears to have proposed to himself to produce an epic which should combine the positive merit of being essentially national with the negative one of avoiding what he had found to condemn in his illustrious predecessors. The personage whom he chose as the central figure was the best fitted for his purpose that French history could furnish. Never had the nation a hero so enduringly popular as the skilful general and brilliant knight whose white plume is a point of light in history —the conqueror who was clement amid the merciless, generous in an age of rapacity, genial in an atmosphere of bloody fanaticism—the good king who wished to see the day when every French peasant should have his fowl in the pot. He was, indeed, an apostate, so far as apostasy may consist in exchanging one form of Christianity for another; but the change was essential to the interests of his country, for his faith formed the sole objection which his Catholic subjects could urge against a king whose rule afforded the strongest security against anarchy, and the surest pledge of national prosperity. The recording angel who took so indulgent a view of Uncle Toby's oath, would scarcely use very dark characters in inscribing on his accusing page Henry's change of religion. It is true, too, that he was noted for his weakness for the fair sex; but so far as this affects his qualification for an epic hero, it wore in him a venial, even a gay and gallant, aspect, when compared with the amours of Achilles or Æneas. While his character thus presented no fatal objections, its intrinsic virtues received uncommon prominence from contrast with such atrocious blots of history as are his royal contemporaries. The abominable beldame Catherine of Medicis—her miscreant sons, Charles IX.

and Henry III.—Pope Sixtus V.—and Philip II. of Spain, one of the gloomiest of remorseless tyrants,—such were conspicuous among the chief personages of the time. Henry was a witness, almost a victim, of what is one of the most horrible crimes in history, in which queen-mother, king, and princes took part, and of which the Pope heartily approved; and living in an atmosphere of domestic treachery and murder, with a Reine Margot for a wife, and her mother and brothers, together with the infamous crew who formed their Court, for associates, it is astonishing that he should have preserved an ordinary share of the better feelings of humanity, and almost a miracle that he should have continued to show himself so manly and so sound of heart.

Upon the death of Charles IX., his successor Henry III. found two great parties opposed in France; that of the Huguenots, headed by Henry of Navarre—and that of the Guises, called the Holy League, which, encouraged by the Pope and supplied with auxiliaries by Spain, sought, under the veil of zeal for the Catholic faith, to supplant the king. Henry III., the "Valois" of the "Henriade," at first declared himself at the head of the League, but found that he was likely to be only a tool in the hands of the able and unscrupulous chief of the Guises. With the best reasons for distrusting each other, they took the sacrament together in solemn pledge of mutual faith—Guise, as he bent reverently over the sacred bread, planning the dethronement of Henry, who, in turn, was meditating the assassination of the other communicant. In this rivalry of treachery Valois prevailed, and caused Guise to be murdered in his presence at Blois—whose fate might be more commiserated had he not

himself murdered, with circumstances specially atrocious, the Admiral Coligny. The king thereupon made common cause with the great enemy of the League, Henry of Navarre. Joining forces, they encamped before Paris, which Guise's brother, the "Mayenne" of the poem, now the chief of the League, held with his troops; and it is at this point that the "Henriade" opens.

The tone of those essays of Voltaire of which we have spoken gives promise of such independence of treatment, that the reader of them is somewhat surprised to find how many close imitations of Homer and Virgil his epic exhibits; and that, in fact, it would never have existed in its present form but for the ancient poets. The resemblance which the relations subsisting between his chief characters bear to the relations of those of the older epics need not be much insisted on, for they involve no deviations from history. If the king, ostensible chief of the besieging forces, plays in some degree Agamemnon to the Achilles of Bourbon, their real champion and leader—if Mornay, like Ulysses, brings all the weight of his wisdom to withdraw the hero from the silken toils of pleasure to the duties of the field—if D'Aumale, the prop of the beleaguered city, renowned in arms, having an inextinguishable thirst for battle, and always ready to undertake a champion of the enemy, resembles Hector in his life as well as in the fate, disastrous to the defenders, which he meets before the walls,—the answer is, that all these personages are represented as they really appeared in the war. But in other cases this kind of warrant does not exist. Just as the events which have preceded the opening of the "Æneid" are made known to the reader through Æneas's recital of them to Dido, so the incidents

which led up to the situation with which the "Henriade" begins are recounted to Queen Elizabeth by Henry, who, like the Trojan chief, enlists the sympathies of his listener, though not with the same result; and this imitation has not the sanction of historical fact. Again, Henry, like the Trojan hero, and like Ulysses, accomplishes the descent into hell, and, like Dante, visits heaven. The fight between Turenne and D'Aumale, which did not really happen, very much resembles that between Turnus and Æneas. Then there is a prophet and a palace of Destiny to connect, as Virgil's Sibyl does, the present of the poem with the future; there are personifications more or less fantastic, as personages having only such allegorical existence must be. Besides a palace of Destiny, there is a temple of Love, with its votaries; and, lastly, Truth herself descends from the skies to visit Bourbon's camp. In strange association with these, the Father of the Universe appears, like a Christian Jupiter, on more than one occasion, and vouchsafes utterances which shake the spheres.

Voltaire, without denying that these are imitations, would probably have considered that they needed no defence. He might think it of small importance that some parts of his machinery were borrowed, provided he turned them to good account. His royal admirer Frederick asserts, indeed, in his preface, that the French poet has imitated the ancients only to surpass them. "If," says the illustrious critic, "he imitates in some passages Homer and Virgil, it is, however, always an imitation which has in it something original, and in which one sees that the judgment of the French poet is infinitely superior to that of the Greek. Compare

Ulysses' descent into hell with that of the seventh canto of the "Henriade," and you will see that the latter is enriched with an infinity of beauties which M. de Voltaire owes only to himself." Without going the whole length of this comparison, we may admit that it is not altogether devoid of justice.

The peculiar difficulty of Voltaire's task lay in the introduction of supernatural personages and events into times so recent as the period of the wars of the League. There were old men living when Voltaire was born who came into the world before Henry IV. quitted it. To bring Truth, and Discord, and divine personages, on so modern a stage, was more than audacious. Nevertheless, if we can get rid of the feeling of incongruity, we find that they fulfil important parts in the plan. Discord, for instance, supplies a link between the fanaticism and intrigue which prevailed at Rome and the state of feeling which actuated the Leaguers in Paris, and brings personages and events into relation with the main action whose appearance would otherwise have remained unaccounted for. It was Voltaire's object, by all means, to exalt out of the sphere of common life the fabric of his poem—likelihood was of small account with him compared with unity and artistic completeness; and viewed in this way, we must allow that the business of the epic has been as well managed as was possible under the circumstances.

Moderate in length compared with some of its predecessors, the "Henriade" contains between four and five thousand lines, divided pretty equally into ten books. It is written, like his tragedies, in rhymed Alexandrines —a kind of verse common in French poetry, but to

English ears unmusical, halting, and monotonous; and, accordingly, the twelve-syllable line has seldom been used among us except to close the Spenserian stanza. The passages selected for translation will be given in this volume in blank verse, which—because it is more pleasing to our ears, and more suitable to our notions of an epic, and also because Voltaire's lines lend themselves to it with peculiar facility—does more justice, perhaps, than any other measure would to the poet; but it may be well to give the first few lines forming the exordium of the poem, in a fashion which endeavours to convey the sound as well as the sense of the original:—

"That hero's praise I sing who lord of France did reign,
In right of his good sword and of his royal strain,
Who wise the State to rule, by long misfortune taught,
Stilled faction, and forgave the foe who mercy sought,
O'erthrew Mayenne, with Spain's and League's combined array,
And, master of the realm, ruled with paternal sway."

Henry of Valois, in his camp before Paris, despairing of success against the League, entreats Bourbon to seek aid from Elizabeth, trusting to the renown and the persuasions of his envoy to make a friend of our great Queen. Bourbon departs accordingly, and, approaching our coast, is driven by a storm to Jersey, where he meets with a venerable hermit, who prophesies that he will be victorious, and will ascend the throne, and gives him very pious and excellent advice respecting the use he should make of his victory. Henry then resumes his voyage; and it will probably propitiate English readers to translate the description of our country under Elizabeth as Henry saw it:—

" He, viewing England, secretly admires
The happy changes in that powerful realm,
Where the abuse of many a wholesome law
Long wrought mischance to subjects and to kings.
Upon that soil, so stained with noble blood—
Upon that throne, whence kings so oft had slipt,—
A woman at her feet held fate enchained,
Dazzling all eyes with splendours of her reign.
This was Elizabeth, whose potent will,
Now up, now down, the scales of nations swayed,
And made the sturdy Briton love her yoke.
Her people in her time forgot their woes:
The plains are covered with their thriving flocks,
Fields with their wheat, and with their ships the deep.
Feared on the land, their empire is the sea;
Their navy, in its pride, holds Neptune slave,
And summons Fortune from the ends of space.
Their capital, once barbarous, has become
The shrine of art, the storehouse of the world,
The temple of great Mars. Within the walls,
Of Westminster three powers combined appear,
Astonished at the tie which holds them close—
The people's deputies, the lords, the king—
Of interests diverse, but made one by law,—
All sacred parts of that unconquered whole—
Self-menacing, to neighbours terrible.
Much blest whene'er the people, dutiful,
In reverence hold the rights of sovereign power,
More blest whene'er a king, wise, gentle, just,
In reverence holds the people's liberties.
'Ah!' Bourbon cried, 'when shall my countrymen,
Like you, find truest glory in sweet peace?
Take pattern here, O monarchs of the earth!
A woman's hand has closed the gates of war,
And, leaving woe and strife to you, has made
The happiness of these, her worshippers.' "

Henry has an interview with the queen, in which he

sets forth the need of France for help; and, at her desire, he relates the tale of the recent misfortunes of his country, their origin, and the particulars of the massacre of St Bartholomew. This narrative occupies the second canto, which Voltaire is said to have composed entirely in the Bastille, retaining it in his memory, and which alone he found no occasion to revise.

In the third canto the oral history of precedent events is contained, including the wars of the League, the death of Charles IX., the murder of Guise, and the reconciliation of the two Henries, thus bringing matters down to the time of the interview. Elizabeth, in a gracious reply, such as she might be expected to make to so gallant a prince, promises men and money —influenced, however, rather by the desire to injure Philip of Spain than to help Valois; and this promise she redeemed by despatching Essex at the head of a considerable body of her troops to join in the siege of Paris.

In the fourth canto we return to the besiegers' camp. Valois finds himself helpless without Bourbon — the Leaguers, issuing from the gates of Paris, dismay him by their rapid successes. In these sallies one leader is conspicuous—the Hector of the League—who is thus described :—

"Of all those champions, he whose valorous deeds
Inspired most dread, spread horror widest round—
Proudest of heart and deadliest of hand—
'Twas thou, young prince, impetuous D'Aumale!
Born of Lorraine's rich blood, whence heroes spring—
Of kings, of laws, and of dull rest the foe!
The flower of all the youth his constant train,
With them he unrelaxing scours the field,

Invading at all points the startled foe,—
Now in dead silence, now with battle-cry,
In sunshine or 'mid shadows of the night.
So, from Caucasian cliff or Athos' peak,
Whence far away are seen cloud, land, and sea,
Eagles and vultures on extended wings
Cleave in their rapid flight the wastes immense,
Harry in fields of air the fluttered tribes,
In woods and meadows rend defenceless flocks,
And to dread summits of their mountain-home,
Blood-stained, bear off the torn and shrieking prey."

D'Aumale had already penetrated to the tents of Valois, the surprised besiegers giving way before him, when Bourbon, just landed from England, came on the field:—

"Then in the midst of them was Henry seen,
Flashing like lightning at the tempest's height.
To the front ranks he flies and leads them on,
Death in his hand, his glances thunderbolts;
As bravely followed, he retrieves the day,
And all the rallying chiefs around him throng."

The Leaguers are repulsed. D'Aumale, trying to rally them, is in danger, when an unexpected auxiliary appears. Discord, "the daughter of Hell," arrives in person on the scene, and dreading the loss of so devoted an adherent of herself, covers him with her shield, and withdraws him within the walls of Paris. She then flies to Mayenne, and addressing him as "Thou, bred under my eyes, formed under my laws," bids him be of good cheer. Creating a storm which checks the advance of the Royalists, she hurries on its wing to Rome, where she has an interview with another allegorical personage, Political Intrigue (*la Politique*), "daughter of Selfishness

and Ambition, of whom are born Fraud and Seduction." It is here that the poet takes the opportunity to deliver his opinion on Sixtus V., the Pope of that day:—

"Under her consecrated tyrants, Rome
Regretted her false gods. . . .
. . . . . .
Sixtus was chief of Rome and of the Church.
If to be honoured with the title "great,"
Lies, truculence, austerity, suffice,
Among the greatest kings must Sixtus rank.
To fifteen years of fraud he owed his place—
So long he hid his merits and his faults,
Seemed to evade the rank for which he burned,
While self-abasement helped him to the prize."

Up to this point readers of the "Henriade" will proceed with pleasure, enjoying its good sense, its spirit, and the clearness and vigour of the poetry. But they will generally lament the introduction of these allegorical actors, who employ themselves, like the partisan deities of Homer, in sowing dissension, instigating crime, and interfering to protect those of one party, or to injure or tempt those of the other, but without the individuality and picturesqueness of the Olympian powers. All they do could have been done, with equal advantage to the plot, by a malignant spirit (like Goethe's Mephistopheles), the emissary of the powers of evil, who might have been represented as the insidious, unseen prompter of passions, words, and actions. Being thus the personification only of the evil tendencies of the actors themselves, such an addition to the *dramatis personæ*, if skilfully managed and rendered vague, shadowy, and mysterious, could have helped to exalt the characters and scenery into an unfamiliar and supernatural atmosphere,

without doing such violence to belief as we have to complain of when we find these very abstract and unsubstantial conditions of social existence bodied forth with features, looks, and garments, taking part in battles, appearing in chariots, and inspiring courage or fear by actual words. Discord, greeting La Politique with "a mysterious air" and a "malignant laugh," flatters and caresses her. Together, they surprise Religion (another personification), and despoil "their august enemy" of her garments—disguised in which they proceed to the assembly of sages in the Sorbonne, where they create confusion and inspire wild counsels:—

"Then, in the name of all, one dotard cries—
'The Church makes kings, absolves them, chastens them;
In us this Church, in us alone its laws:
Valois, judged reprobate, no more is king—
Of oaths once sacred now we break the bonds.'
Scarce had he ceased when Discord, void of ruth,
Writes down in blood this hateful ordinance;
Each swears by her, and signs beneath her eye."

The effect of the decree is seen presently, when all the priests issue from their cloisters, with arms and standards, chanting sedition—"audacious priests, but futile men-at-arms." Representatives from the different quarters of Paris join the tumult:—

"Fury and treason, arrogance and death,
March at their head through rivulets of blood:
Born in obscurity, in squalor nursed,
Hatred of kings their sole nobility;"

they threaten the Senate, which still fulfils its functions in the name of the king, and seize the principal members.

Discord next proceeds to give effect to the decree of

the Sorbonne by instigating the fanatical monk, Jacques Clement, to get out of Paris and murder the king. In the fifth canto is described how Discord summons, from the infernal abodes, the demon of fanaticism, who conducts the monk to his victim. The poet describes the last moments of the king, at which Bourbon, his successor, was present:—

"Already Valois touched on his last hour,
His eyes perceiving but a fading light;
Around him, weeping, stood his courtiers ranged,
Parted in secret by divergent aims,
But pouring in one common voice their grief.
Some, trusting in the good a change might bring,
Mourned faintly for their dying monarch's fate;
Others, enfolded in their selfish fears,
The loss of fortune, not of sovereign, wept.
Amid this clamorous hubbub of complaint
'Twas Bourbon who alone shed genuine tears;
Valois had been his enemy, but souls
Like his at such a time their wrongs forget.
Nought but old friendship weighed with Henry then;
In vain his interests 'gainst his pity strove,
The honest hero's thoughts were far away
From what the king's death gave—a kingly crown.
By a last effort Valois turned on him
The heavy eyes which death was soon to close.
Placing his hand on those victorious hands,
'Ah, leave,' he cried, 'those generous tears unshed!
The outraged universe should mourn your king;
But you must fight, my Bourbon, reign, avenge.
I die and leave you in the midst of storms,
Cast on a strand all covered with my wreck.
My throne awaits you, yours my throne should be—
Enjoy the prize your arm has guarded well;
But think how ceaseless storms environ it,
And fear the Giver as you mount the seat.

O may you, of your dogmas disabused,
His worship and His altars raise again!
Farewell—reign happy—may a stronger power
Protect your life from the assassin's steel.
You know the League, you see what blows it strikes,
That aim, through me, to reach your bosom too.
The day may come . . a still more barbarous hand . .
Just heaven! O spare the earth a soul so rare! . .
Permit . . ' but at these words death, pitiless,
Comes rushing on his head, and ends his lot."

In the camp Bourbon is hailed as king; in the city the Leaguers assemble to choose a monarch. Whilst they are occupied in their deliberations (in which Potier, a citizen, by his assertion of Bourbon's rights in the very presence of Mayenne, earns for himself an immortal niche in the poem), they are startled by a sudden call to arms. Henry has chosen that moment to direct an assault upon the walls:—

"Bourbon employed not those propitious hours
In rendering funeral honours to the king,
In decking forth his tomb with titles brave
Which living pride upon the dead bestows;
Not by his hand those desolated shores
Were cumbered with the pomp of sepulchres,
Whereby, despite the strokes of time and fate,
The arrogance of rank prevails o'er death:
He thought to send the Valois in his grave
Darksome a tribute worthier of his shade,
Punish his murderers, his foes confound,
And o'er the land subdued spread happiness."

The attack, in which the English auxiliaries, led by Essex, take part, "marching for the first time under our colours, and seeming astonished to serve our kings," is successful. The suburbs are taken; and Henry, excited

by the combat, appeals to his soldiers to bring fire and sword to bear on the city itself, when he is checked by a supernatural interference :—

"Just then, from out the bosom of a cloud,
A glorious phantom grew upon the sight;
Its shape majestic, mastering the winds,
Upon their wings came down towards the king.
Of the Divinity the living rays
Full on its brow immortal beauty shed."

This is the spirit of Henry's ancestor St Louis, who rebukes the fury of the assailants, and thus addresses the king :—

"'I am that happy king whom France reveres,
Father of Bourbons, and thy father too.
Louis, who lately combated for you;
Louis, whose faith your alien heart neglects;
Louis, who grieves for you, admires you, loves you.
God will one day conduct you to his throne.
In Paris, you, my son, shall conqueror tread,
Not for your valour, but your clemency;
'Tis Heaven thus speaks by me, its messenger.'"

Then, seeing the king exposed to a terrible hail of missiles from the walls, the saint withdraws him from the combat and conveys him to Vincennes. St Louis continues to be an important actor in the rest of the epic, and with happy effect. The objections made to Discord, Truth, &c., do not apply to him. A sentiment common to all nations warrants the poet in assuming that a man's departed forefathers continue to bestow on him interest and protection; and there is a peculiar propriety in representing the great French hero as specially watched over by his sainted ancestor, to whom the Bourbons have always looked with veneration. "Son of St Louis," said

the Abbé Edgeworth to Louis XVI. on the scaffold, "ascend to heaven!"

The seventh canto is in some respects the most remarkable. It opens by telling us that the infinite goodness of God has placed among us two beneficent beings, always lovable inhabitants of earth, supports in trouble, treasures in poverty; the one is Sleep, the other Hope. St Louis summons both to Henry. Sleep heard the call in his secret caves; softly he came through the fresh bowers; the winds were hushed at sight of him; happy dreams, children of hope, fluttered towards the Prince and covered him with olive and laurel, mixed with their own poppies. Then the sainted Louis, placing on the forehead of the sleeper his own diadem, exhorts him, saying that it is a small thing to be a hero or a king without a share of enlightening grace, and that, less to reward than to instruct him, he will show him the secrets of a more durable empire. He then invites him to fly with him to the bosom of God Himself.

Frederick the Great specially admired the device of taking Henry to heaven and hell in spirit, in his sleep, rather than in the body, as Æneas and Ulysses went. "The single idea," says the admiring monarch, "of attributing to Henry's dream what he sees in heaven and hell, and what is prognosticated to him in the temple of Destiny, is worth the whole of the 'Iliad;' for the dream brings all which happens within the rules of reality, whereas the journey of Ulysses into hell is devoid of all the ornaments which might have given an air of truth to the ingenious fiction of Homer."

Most readers will concur with Frederick so far as to consider it judicious to make the dream the medium

through which the hero views the celestial and infernal scenery.

"He ceased, and in a fiery car the two
Course through the heavens ere a moment's space—
As storm and lightnings in the night are seen
To dart from pole to pole, and split the air."

What they saw, transported thus to distant worlds, the poet boldly proceeds to describe; and we may see how, in taking this survey of the universe, he has been influenced by his study of the theories of Newton:—

"In the bright centre of those orbs immense,
That cannot hide from us their distant paths,
Flames on that star of day, divinely lit,
Which round his burning axle ever turns,
And whence are poured unceasing floods of light.
His presence 'tis that gives to matter life,
Deals out the days, the seasons, and the years,
To all the varying worlds that round him glide.
These orbs, to law obedient, as they move,
Attract, repel each other ceaselessly,
And, interchanging rule and maintenance,
Reciprocate the rays by him bestowed.
Beyond their courses, in the depths of space,
Where matter swims, by God alone held in,
Suns without number are, and endless worlds.
In that profound abyss He opes their paths—
Beyond all heav'ns the God of Heaven doth dwell.

The hero follows his celestial guide
To depths from whence the countless spirits come
Who bodies animate and people worlds;
Therein our souls are after death replunged,
From fleshly prison-house for aye set free.

Here a just Judge assembles at His feet
Immortal spirits which His breath has made

The Being this whom, knowing not, we serve,
Whom the whole world by different names adores;
He hears our clamours from empyreal heights,
And this huge mass of error pitying views,
These senseless images, which ignorance
Makes piously of wisdom infinite."

"Death, the frightful daughter of Time, brings before him the inhabitants of our sorrowful world;" and, as they appear, the different priesthoods of the earth look in vain for the beings they had deemed divine. Everything being in a moment made clear to them, the dead hear in silence the eternal judgments. Henry dares not approach the throne whence are delivered the sentences "which so many of us presumptuous mortals try in vain to anticipate;" but nevertheless he cannot refrain from reasoning on what he sees:—

"'What is,'" said Henry, speaking to himself,
'The law supreme by God for mortals made?
Does He condemn them that they shut their eyes
To knowledge which Himself has made obscure?
Does He, an unjust Master, judge their acts
By code of Christians which they never knew?
No; He who made us means to save us all;
On all sides He instructs us, speaks to us,
Graving on every heart a natural law
Alone unchangeable and ever pure.
Doubtless by this law are the heathen judged;
They, too, are Christians if their hearts be right.'"

This questioning receives from the throne itself, in accents of thunder, a reply which

"All the immortal choir is hushed to hear,
And every star repeats it in his course."

Henry (so the voice says) is to beware of surrendering

himself to his feeble reason. "God has made thee to love, not to comprehend Him; invisible to thine eyes, He is to reign in thine heart; He hates injustice, but pardons error, except voluntary error, which is punished."

The king is now conveyed to the regions of eternal sorrow. There, besides more allegorical personages suitable to the scene—such as Envy, Pride, and Ambition—he sees Jacques Clement, the murderer of Valois, still clutching his bloody knife. There he sees also tyrants and their insolent ministers undergoing retribution: but the Saint assures him that even these are not punished beyond their deserts, but only as a father punishes his children; that though the gifts of the Deity are infinite, His chastenings know bounds, and that He will not requite moments of weakness and fleeting pleasures with everlasting torment. The scene then changes to the abode of happy spirits, where he sees the just kings, wise ministers, and devoted warriors of France, including Joan of Arc, "shame of the English, of our throne the stay." And not these alone, for the palace of Destiny opens for him its hundred iron gates, showing him the great men of the future (among whom Voltaire gives an honourable place to his friend Marshal Villars) and the seer's own descendants. Henry exults to find one of these becoming king of Spain, but St Louis checks his transports by hinting how dangerous an honour this may prove to be; and with this the vision ends:—

> "The goddess of the dawn, all rosy-faced
> Opes in the East the palace of the Sun;
> To other regions Night withdrew her veil—
> With darkness also fled the fluttering dreams.

The prince, awakening, in his heart perceived
A strength new-born, an ardour heaven-inspired;
His glances spread around respect and fear,
And majesty in all his aspect shone.
So when the avenger of the chosen race
Had on Mount Sinai conversed with God,
The Hebrews at his feet crouched in the dust,
And could not bear the brightness of his eyes."

The Leaguers, disheartened by Henry's successes, are about to receive important succour. Count Egmont, marching from the Netherlands with a strong force of Spanish cavalry, was approaching Paris to join Mayenne, who hoped, thus reinforced, to attack the king with advantage. Henry met them both in the open field, and the incidents of the battle and its results make up the eighth canto. The well-known words of Henry to his soldiers are embodied in the poem:—

"'When the fight's hottest, look to my white plume!
In honour's path it still shall show the way.'"

Defeated on this famous field of Ivry, Mayenne and the Leaguers retreat into Paris. It was now that the victorious Bourbon gave notable proof of the generosity which was so conspicuous an element in his fine character. To the prisoners taken in battle he, on the spot, gave their liberty, telling them that they were free either to return to Mayenne or to join his own standard. At the same time he restrains his own troops from carnage:—

"Lord of his warriors, he their courage curbs,
And seems no more the lion splashed with blood
Who terror spread, and death, from rank to rank,
But a mild deity, who lays aside

His thunder, binds the storm, and cheers the earth.
O'er his brow, threatening, blood-stained, terrible,
Was spread the sweet serenity of peace."

The prisoners join his ranks. The news of his victory spreads, and the Leaguers are almost in despair. Discord, knowing that with his triumph will come the end of her reign, resorts, in order to arrest his career, to a last stratagem, which forms the subject of the ninth canto.

It might be supposed that the solemn incidents, the celestial experience, and the divine counsel of the preceding canto would have fortified the king against such a disreputable device as that which the malignant Discord now had recourse to. She repairs to the temple of Love (which is full of allegorical personages), and rousing the deity from his bed of flowers, enlists him in her cause. Delighted with a mission so completely suited to him, he flies at once to the plains of Ivry, near which Henry was hunting. Love "felt at sight of his victim an inhuman joy; he hardened his features and made ready his chain,"—then commanding the winds to assemble the clouds, and to bring on night with thunder and lightning, he lit his flambeau to lead him astray:—

"Left by his people 'mid the woods, the king
Followed this hostile star that lit the shades,
As the benighted traveller is seen
To follow meteors which the earth exhales—
Those treacherous fires which shed malignant light
To lure the victim to the precipice."

The "precipice" is the fair Mademoiselle d'Estrées, the "belle Gabrielle" of history, then a dweller in these woods:—

"Just entering on that age, so perilous,
Which gives the passions sure ascendency,
Her haughty, generous heart, though formed for love,
Had never listened to a lover's vows,
Resembling in its spring the nascent rose,
Which, peeping forth, shuts in its loveliness,
Hides from the amorous winds its bosom's freight,
But opens to the sunshine calm and clear."

Throwing away his torch and his arrows, the god takes the form of a child, and approaching Gabrielle, tells her that the conqueror of Mayenne is at that moment near her:—

"Love hugged himself at seeing her so fair—
Sure of success when such attractions aid.
Her raiment's simple art (by him inspired)
To eyes bewitched seemed Nature's own effect.
Her golden hair, abandoned to the breeze,
Now veiled the young perfections of her breast,
Now rising, showed their charm unspeakable.
Her modesty but lent new loveliness—
Not that severe and sad austerity
Which frightens love, and beauty too, away,
But the sweet shyness, childlike, innocent,
Which lights the face with rosy tints divine,
Inspires respect, love's ardour animates,
And crowns the transports of its conqueror."

Forgetful of the claims of his Reine Margot, who had given him no great reason to be mindful of them, the too susceptible hero falls a very easy victim to the beauties of this fascinating maiden. Love, continuing to lend his treacherous aid, spreads enchanted bowers of myrtle, and throws over the whole region his powerful spell:—

"All speaks of love there—in the fields the birds
Redouble their endearments and their songs.

The sweating reaper, coming ere the dawn
To swathe the yellowing ears that summer swells,
Pauses in trouble while his heaving breast
Appears to wonder at its new desires;
So he stays, spell-bound, in these regions fair,
And, sighing, turns from his unfinished sheaves.
Near him the shepherdess forgets her flocks,
And drops the spindle from her trembling hand.
How with such sorcery could Gabrielle strive?
The spell entranced her irresistibly;
'Twas hers to combat on that hapless day
Her youth, her heart, a hero, and the god."

Everything being thus satisfactorily accounted for, without detriment either to the heroism of the monarch or the modesty of the maiden (all blame for whatever may happen obviously resting with the supernatural powers who have so craftily brought them together), the pair are kept in the silken chains of the malignant deity, while the chiefs of the army wonder what has become of the general, and the soldiers, bereft of his leadership, seem already vanquished. In these critical circumstances, the Genius of France, summoned to the rescue by St Louis, interposes, and leads the prudent Mornay, "whose solid virtues were his only loves"—and who has, consequently, but small indulgence for the king's weakness—to the retreat of the enthralled monarch. The uncompromising sage, fixing on him, even in the very arms of Gabrielle, a sad and severe gaze, preserves a silence that must have been very embarrassing to the king, who at last breaks it by acknowledging his own fault and Mornay's devotion. The fair D'Estrées is left, fainting, to the protecting care of Love, and the errant monarch returns to his army.

In the last canto the siege recommences. The respite has revived the courage of the Leaguers, but the king is impatient to finish his conquest. The fierce D'Aumale exhorts the garrison to sally and become the assailants. He tells them that "the Frenchman who awaits the attack is already half beaten;" but he fails to inspire them with his own courage, and at last issues alone from the gates to challenge a champion of the enemy. All Henry's chiefs are eager to meet him, but to the valiant Turenne is awarded the honour of the encounter; and he goes out to meet the foe, while the citizens flock to the ramparts, and the king's soldiers range themselves opposite to see the combat:—

> "Paris, the king, the army, heaven and hell,
> Upon this fight illustrious fixed their eyes."

The champions, who engage without armour, and with only swords for weapons, advance upon each other with few but characteristic words:—

> "'God, my king's arbiter,'" so prayed Turenne,
> 'Come down and judge his cause, and fight for me!
> Courage is naught without Thy guardian hand;
> Not in myself but all in Thee I trust.'
> Answered D'Aumale: 'I trust in mine own arm;
> 'Tis on ourselves the combat's lot depends;
> Vainly the coward makes appeal to God—
> Serene in heaven He leaves me to myself;
> The side of victory is the side of right,
> And the sole arbiter the god of war.'"

Of the two warriors, D'Aumale shows himself in the fight the more eager, strong, and furious—Turenne the more skilful and restrained. While D'Aumale exhausts himself in vain efforts, the king's soldier fights calmly

and dexterously, and, pressing on at the right moment, strikes down, with a mortal blow, the champion of the League. Extended on the sand, he still vainly menaces Turenne. His sword escapes from his hand; his looks grow wild with the horror of defeat; he raises himself, looks towards Paris, and falls dead. Mayenne, looking on, sees in the event the prognostication of his own approaching overthrow. Soldiers bear, with slow steps, the body within the walls:—

"This bloody spectacle, this fatal train,
Enters through crowds bewildered, stupefied;
All shrink at sight of that disfigured corpse,
Those brows all blood-stained, and that mouth agape,
That head low-hanging and with dust defiled,
Those eyes in which his horrors Death displays.
No cries are heard, no tears are seen to fall,
Compassion, shame, dejection, and despair
Stifle their sobs and render sorrow mute."

As the siege goes on famine seizes on the city, and this canto contains some horrible pictures of the extremities to which the unhappy people are reduced. Henry gives another signal proof of magnanimity by sending in supplies to his perishing enemies. But the people, led by the priests, still refuse to acknowledge him, and more of supernatural aid is necessary for his final victory. St Louis again appeals to heaven—Truth herself descends upon the tents of the king, and gives him clearer views. He perceives it to be his duty to profess the Catholic faith—thereupon the opposition of the League ceases, and he enters Paris amidst his now submissive subjects:—

"The people—changed from this auspicious day—
Know their true father, conqueror, and king."

HIS MIDDLE AGE.

CHAPTER VIII.

ADRIENNE LE COUVREUR.

On Voltaire's return to Paris in 1728, he for some time lived retired, almost concealed, in a remote faubourg, and began to develop his extraordinary talent for financial speculation. He had inherited from his father (who died in 1722) and his brother some little income, which, together with his pension, made up about £400 a-year; to this he had just added the English subscription for his "Henriade." But as his first financial successes seem to have come in the form of large winnings in a lottery, it is not necessary to look beyond these for the basis of his fortune. He largely increased his gains by investing them in various well-selected enterprises, such as the commerce with Cadiz and speculations in Barbary corn. He then acquired an interest in a contract for provisioning the army of Italy, by which he gained £30,000. His subsequent investments were so advantageous—in annuities, loans, and mortgages—that he lived and died the richest of all eminent men of letters, and was quite

independent of the profits of his writings, of which he always appears to have been careless.

His play of "Brutus" was the first fruit of his exile; and this he considered his most forcibly written tragedy. It breathed a spirit of freedom long unknown to the French stage, and set forth in eloquent language the rights of an oppressed people. After the performance of it, Fontenelle told the author that "he did not think him fitted for tragedy; that his style was too forcible, too lofty, too brilliant." "Then I must study your pastorals again," said Voltaire.

It was about this time that Voltaire, finding his former friend Suzanne, now Marquise de Gouvernet, inhabiting a fine house in a fashionable quarter of Paris, wished to renew his acquaintance with her. She had intimated no such wish; but he, who had made love to so many high-born ladies, might without presumption approach this butterfly Marquise with whom he had been so intimate when she was a chrysalis. When he presented himself at her house, a huge Swiss hall-porter inquired Voltaire's name, on learning which, he observed, in a tone by no means encouraging, that it was not on the Marquise's visitors' list. On returning home, Voltaire turned this rebuff to excellent account: he wrote to the Marquise a poetical epistle, of that half gay, half serious, and all graceful cast, in which he is unrivalled, and which is to this day among the most famous of his lighter poems.[1]

[1] This piece is not of a kind to which translation could do justice. The name by which it is known to French readers, "The You and the Thou," implies this. In the passages where he reverts to their former intimacy, he uses the Thou,—where he speaks of her present position, the You; and we have, of course, no equivalent pronouns of famili-

There is no doubt that Voltaire felt keenly the indignity and injustice which he had undergone, and which had forced him into exile. In a letter of instructions written from England to his agent, he says, "If messieurs my debtors profit by my misfortunes and my absence to refuse payment, as others have done, you must not trouble yourself to bring them to reason—'tis but a trifle. The torrent of bitterness that I have drunk makes these few drops of small account." Nevertheless, except the good-humoured piece, the "Bastille," already mentioned, there is not a word in any of his writings to show that he was mindful of having been so grievously insulted and oppressed. What is no less extraordinary is, that possessing the courage, power, and disposition to defy those whom it was so dangerous to provoke, he never assailed the Government under which it had been possible to inflict on him such a measure of injury, and the hostility of which, directed by his potent enemies, rendered his long existence one of contest, evasion, and exile. No Frenchman living was more alive than he to the evils of absolute power. "Despotism," he says, "is the abuse of royalty, as anarchy of republics. A sultan who, without justice, or form of justice, imprisons or puts to death his subjects, is a highway robber who calls himself Your Highness." Nor was any one more alive than he to the evil of a privileged class. "That government would be worthy of Hottentots," he tells us, "in which a certain number of men should be allowed to say, 'Tis for those who work to pay—we owe nothing, because we do nothing." But it is only in such

arity and respect. To this, and to its grace of expression, the poem owes its fame, rather than to more substantial merits.

abstract fashion that he lets his ideas about government be seen. He flattered the Regent and Louis XV.; his eulogies on Louis XIV. are splendid; he would have been a courtier if he could. Far different is the spirit in which he attacked what he called superstition. It is evident that he thought spiritual despotism worse, and therefore a fitter object of hostility, than temporal despotism. The lower classes were sunk in ignorance, the upper in frivolity; while among their pastors a vicious life was so common as to be scarcely a scandal. Amid such a state of things the Church sought to maintain its authority not by amending the lives of the priesthood and humanising their precepts, but by maintaining the empire of stupidity and superstition over the ignorant, and by forcibly repressing the dissent of those who were neither stupid nor superstitious. Voltaire, therefore, believed that to sap the misused authority of the Church was the first necessary step towards awakening the mind of the nation.

Soon after his return to France, an event occurred which was well calculated to exasperate his hostility against intolerance. Adrienne le Couvreur, the finest tragic actress of the age, the best who had ever at that time trod the French stage, died in Paris in the height of her fame. She was a woman of a warm and generous heart; she wrote letters in a way in which only the most cultivated Frenchwomen of the time, such as Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Sevigné, could write them—that is to say, in a way which raised and refined the standard of the French language. She was the first example of a French actress who combined professional renown with consideration in society. She

had long been the dear and intimate friend of Voltaire, had represented with extraordinary effect most of his heroines, and had played Jocasta only five days before her death. He had been summoned to her deathbed, and she died in his arms. Such was the woman to whom the clergy of Paris refused Christian burial, because of her profession. Her body was taken secretly by night in a hackney-coach to the bank of the Seine, not very far from where is now the Pont de la Concorde, and there hastily interred. It may be imagined with what feelings Voltaire, bringing with him from England a tenfold horror of fanaticism, beheld this outrage; and those feelings, which he himself describes as "indignation, tenderness, and pity," found expression in verse:[1]—

"ON THE DEATH OF THE RENOWNED ACTRESS, MADEMOISELLE LE COUVREUR.

"What do I see! the lips that breathed delight,
The lovely eyes, so eloquently bright,
With livid horrors of the grave o'erspread!
O Muses, Graces, Loves, whose looks she wore,
Whom we both worshipped, your own work restore!
Too late—'tis o'er—one kiss, and she is dead.
Is dead!—and as the dismal tidings fly,
All hearers stand transfixed with grief, as I.
I hear the sorrowing Arts their loss deplore;
Weeping, they cry, 'Melpomene's no more!'

[1] In poems of this class he seeks compensation for the severe restrictions to which writers of French poetry must submit, in frequently varying the order of the rhymes and the measure; and in these particulars the translation follows the original with sufficient closeness to preserve the external resemblance. In translating pieces of similar versification the same rule is observed in this volume.

What will ye say, ye races yet unborn,
Who learn the cruel wrong these Arts forlorn
Endure from those who rob the dead of peace?
A grave they her deny with scorn—
Her, to whom altars had been raised in Greece.
Flattered, adored, while she on earth remained,
I saw obsequious crowds her glance await.
She dies—and so the idol is profaned!
She charmed the world—a sin to expiate!

Henceforth that bank of Seine is holy ground;
The spot where thy rejected dust finds room,
By thy shade hallowed, in our verse renowned,
Is more a temple than a tomb.
Here my Saint Denis[1] is. I reverent bow
Before the shrine of genius, spirit, grace;
I loved them living, I adore them now,
Despite the grisly king's embrace—
Despite the ungrateful and the base,
Who bear this grave's dishonour deep, not thou.

Ah! must we always see our daily life,
So light and gay, with bigot laws at strife?
Our fickle race, whose views uncentred range,
Exalt, disparage, as the mood may change?
Is there no land but England where
Man's thought is free, and gains free birth?
Rival of Athens, region blest and fair,
That, with its other tyrants, has cast forth
Old shameful bigotries; where sages dare
Speak all their thought, where honour waits on worth.
No art is scorned there, no achievement vain;
The conqueror of our host on Blenheim's plain,
Dryden the lofty, Addison the wise,
Sweet Oldfield,[2] Newton, reader of the skies—

[1] The burial-place of French royalty.

[2] Mrs Oldfield, the famous actress, died in the same year as Mlle. Le Couvreur, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

All share the hospitable fane.
And Adrienne's dust in Westminster would lie
With statesmen, poets, kings, and chivalry,
For England's gifted rank her great among;
Freedom and plenty in their island-home,
Have roused up from its sleep of ages long
The spirit that ennobled Greece and Rome.
Are then Apollo's laurels dead beneath
Neglect and drought in our unkindly sand?
Why is my native land no more the land
Of genius and its honouring wreath?"

The young Count D'Argental, Voltaire's friend, was an ardent admirer of this lady, from whom he received in return for his devotion nothing but friendship and good advice. He lived to be very old; and, fifty years after her death, being then past eighty, he heard that the owner of some ground near the river had discovered, while preparing to build there, some vestiges of her grave. The old man hastened to the spot, recognised the resting-place as hers, and obtained leave to erect a monument over it, on which he inscribed some verses expressive of the passion that half a century had not sufficed to extinguish.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH OF CÆSAR.

THE spirit of liberty which animated Voltaire's poem soon excited attention. Copies of it had passed among his friends from hand to hand, and passages became known to some of his enemies, who denounced him to the Chancellor. It was a curious feature of authorship in those days that an eminent writer might have, and often had, "enemies"—that there were people anxious to injure or destroy him; still more curious was it that these enemies should have the power of blighting the most promising career. What could enemies have done in our day against Mr Dickens, or Mr Thackeray, or Mr Tennyson? The power they had then was owing to the fact that no book could be openly published without the permission of appointed officials, and that those, frequently quite incompetent as judges of literary work, were open to many kinds of influence. Thus a personal dislike to an author on the part of a seemingly contemptible person, might assume a very practical form when a whisper to somebody who could influence a minister or a censor of the press might have such important consequences. Voltaire's social qualities were such, at once

brilliant and aggressive, that in proportion to the many who admired would be the many who disliked him; while his writings had already irritated the sensitive suspicion of the clergy. But, besides this kind of animosity, there was another that was full of mischief—the jealousy which genius and success inspire in the unsuccessful. An author of our day can safely despise the rancours thus excited, which, indeed, rarely take the form of injurious or combined attack; but they were very formidable when they could find free vent in systematic misrepresentation of, and libels upon, any eminent object of envy who lacked powerful protectors, or had powerful ill-wishers; and all his life, Voltaire was beset by bravoes of the press—the Grub Street of Paris—who, sometimes set on by others, sometimes stabbing on their own account, made it their occupation, without having any personal quarrel to avenge, to malign him.

With his recollection of the Bastille still fresh, he thought it expedient to withdraw quietly to Rouen, causing a report to spread that he was returning to England. He had an abundance of literary projects to occupy him. The tragedies of the "Death of Cæsar," "Eryphile," and "Zaïre;" the 'History of Charles XII.;' a satirical poem, the "Temple of Taste;" another poem, the "Temple of Friendship;" and the opera of "Samson,"—were the product of about two years' work at this time, besides the preparation for the press of his "Letters on the English," originally written from England to his friend Thiriot.

He had been accustomed to translate passages from the best English poets into verse for the benefit of his friends. Among these pieces was the scene between

Antony and the Roman people in "Julius Cæsar." "Voltaire," says a French editor of the "Death of Cæsar," "instead of translating the monstrous work of Shakespeare, composed, in the English taste, the present play." For the most part, its plot runs parallel to that of Shakespeare; only Voltaire, according to his principle of admitting nothing into tragedy which is not elevated above common life, gives us none of those scenes between citizens, and none of those sentiments of the mob, which lend so much of life and reality to the English play, and he omits, too, the softening elements supplied by Portia and Calphurnia. On the other hand, he introduces a new and strong point in making Brutus the *son* of Cæsar. The dictator, in an early scene, reveals to Antony how he had secretly married Servilia, the sister of Cato; that stern Republican, ignorant of the marriage, had caused her to wed another, and Brutus had passed for the son of this second husband. But, in dying, Servilia wrote to remind Cæsar that he was Brutus's true father. On this ground Cæsar accounts for the fondness with which, in spite of Brutus's unceasing opposition to himself, he regards that implacable patriot, and even finds excuses for that hostility; as thus:—

"'If Brutus owes me life, if truly he
Be Cæsar's son, a master he must hate.
I from my earliest youth have thought like him;
I hated Sylla and all tyrants else.
Had not puffed Pompey sought to smother me
Beneath his glory, I were freedom's friend.
Born proud, ambitious, still for virtue born,
Were I not Cæsar, I would Brutus be.'"

At this point Brutus enters with the Republican

senators; they remonstrate with the Dictator, who retorts with scorn, and who, retaining Brutus for a moment, while dismissing his companions, tells him that it is Brutus alone who can disarm Cæsar—it is he alone whom Cæsar desires to love. Brutus replies:—

"'If thou keep promise, all my being's thine;
If thou'rt a tyrant, I abhor thy smiles:
I will not stay with thee and Antony,
Since he, uncitizened, demands a king.'"

The conspirators meet; and Brutus, impelled to action by such appeals as Shakespeare, following history, tells of, is for killing Cæsar. Before Pompey's statue he vows the death of the Dictator; the others have left the scene, and he is following, when Cæsar's entrance stays him. The ambitious chief reproaches the Republican, reasons with him, draws him almost to confess his fell design, and then gives him Servilia's letter, in which the relationship between them is revealed. Brutus receives the intelligence with more horror than satisfaction; to Cæsar's appeals he at length replies, that if he be indeed his father, he will make one single prayer to him:—

"'Decree me present death—or cease to reign!'"

Cæsar, exasperated, bursts forth against him:—

"'Ah, savage foe!—tiger, whom I caress!—
Unnatural flesh that turns my flesh to stone!—
Thou art no more my son. Go, citizen!
From you remorseless my despairing heart,
The heart you stab, a stern example takes.
Go—Cæsar was not made to pray in vain;
I learn of Brutus human ties to spurn.
I know you not. Raised by my power o'er law
No more I let too partial mercy plead,

But with clear conscience give my anger way.
Facile too long, I now of pardoning tire;
Sylla I'll copy even in his rage,
And all you traitors at the storm shall quake.
Inhuman foe, go, seek your worthless friends;
They all defy me, all shall feel my wrath,
And, knowing what I can, learn what I dare.
Ruthless I'll show myself, and thou the cause.'"

Brutus imparts the secret of his birth to the other conspirators, and resolves that it shall not move him from his purpose. In another scene with Cæsar, he so far softens as to kneel to him in entreaty that he will forego the crown at which he aims; both are inflexible, and "the mightiest Julius" is slain. Antony addresses the people, but not with the artful eloquence which renders his speech, in the English play, unequalled as a popular appeal. Nevertheless the situations, the conduct, the language of Voltaire's play, are all of a stamp that will cause most of its readers (especially if they do not place it at the disadvantage of a comparison with the "monstrous work of Shakespeare") to think it worthy of its lofty theme.

CHAPTER X.

ZAIRE.

In the preface to a tragedy addressed to Bolingbroke, he thus speaks of the difficulties offered to composition in French verse: "That which affrighted me most in re-entering on this career was the severity of our poetry, and the slavery of rhyme. I regretted the happy liberty you have of writing your tragedies in blank verse; of lengthening, and more, of shortening, nearly all your words; of making the verses run into one another; and of creating, in case of need, new terms, which are always adopted among you when they are sonorous, intelligible, and necessary. An English poet, said I, is a free man, who makes his language subservient to his genius; the French is a slave to rhyme, obliged sometimes to make four verses in order to express what an Englishman would render in one. The Englishman says all he wishes—the Frenchman only what he can; the one travels in a vast highway—the other marches in shackles, in a narrow and slippery path.

"But we can never shake off the yoke of rhyme—it is essential to French poetry. Our language does not agree with inversions; our verses do not suffer the running of

one into another—at least this liberty is very rare; our syllables cannot produce a sensible harmony by their long or short measures; our cæsuras and a certain number of feet would not suffice to distinguish verse from prose. Besides, so many great masters — Corneille, Racine, Boileau — have so accustomed our ears to the harmony of rhyme, that we could not endure any other; and he who wished to deliver himself from the burthen which the great Corneille carried, would be regarded with reason, not as a bold genius adventuring in a new route, but as a weak man who could not journey in the ancient ways."

The tragedy of "Brutus," acted on a private stage, was not permitted to appear in print, and was not represented till many years later. But he gave "Eryphile" to the stage, which was a failure; and, very soon after, "Zaire," which had a prodigious success. It was in this play that he first exchanged the classic for the romantic style, without, however, ceasing to preserve the unities, and, no longer the imitator of Racine and Corneille, became himself the founder of a school. "Zaire," he says, "is the first drama in which I have dared to abandon myself to all the sensibility of my heart: it is my only tender tragedy."

"Those who are fond of literary history," says the advertisement to the play, "will like to hear how the piece was produced. Many ladies had reproached the author with not putting enough love into his tragedies: he replied that he did not believe it to be the proper place for love; but since they must absolutely have amorous heroes, he would do as others did." . . . "The idea," he says, again, "struck me, of contrasting in the same picture, honour, rank, country,

and religion on the one side, with the tenderest and most ill-starred love on the other; the manners of Mahometans with those of Christians; the court of a soldan with that of a king of France; and to cause Frenchmen to appear for the first time upon the tragic stage."

The plot of the piece, forming a very pretty and ingenious tale, will be best condensed from his own sketch of it, written for a friend:—

Palestine had been wrested from the Christian princes by Saladin. Noradin, of Tartar race, had then rendered himself master of it. Orosman, son of Noradin, a young man full of greatness, virtue, and passion, began to reign with glory in Jerusalem. He had brought to the Syrian throne the spirit of liberty of his ancestors. He despised the rigid rules of the seraglio, and did not desire to augment his dignity by remaining invisible to strangers and to his subjects. He treated Christian slaves with mildness. Among them was a child, taken in Noradin's reign, in the sack of Cæsarea. This child having been recovered, at the age of nine, by the Christians, was brought to St Louis, the king of France, who undertook the charge of bringing him up. He took in France the name of Nerestan, and, returning to Syria, was again made prisoner, and shut up among the slaves of Orosman, and here he met once more in slavery a girl with whom he had been captured in Cæsarea. This girl, Zaire, was ignorant, as well as Nerestan, of her birth; she only knew that she had been born a Christian, as he and some other slaves a little older than herself assured her. She had always preserved an ornament which enclosed a cross, the only proof that she possessed of her religion. Another slave, Fatima, born a Christian, and placed in the seraglio at the age of ten, imparted to Zaire what little she knew herself of the religion of her fathers. Young Nerestan, who was free to see Zaire and Fatima, animated with the zeal then proper to French cavaliers, and with the tenderest friendship for Zaire, sought

to incline her to Christianity. He proposed to purchase Zaire, Fatima, and ten Christian knights with the property he had acquired in France, and to carry them to the Court of St Louis. He had the boldness to demand from the Soldan permission to return to France on his parole, and the Soldan had the generosity to allow it. Nerestan set out, and was two years absent from Jerusalem.

Meanwhile the beauty of Zaire increased with her years, and the touching simplicity of her character aided still more than her beauty to render her lovable. Orosman saw and conversed with her. A heart like his could not love otherwise than madly. He resolved to throw off the effeminate habits which had been the bane of so many Asiatic sovereigns, and to possess in Zaire one who should share his heart with the duties of a prince and warrior. The faint ideas of Christianity, barely traced on the heart of Zaire, vanished at sight of the Soldan; she loved him no less than she was loved by him, without letting ambition mix in the least with the purity of her tenderness. This is how she speaks to her confidante Fatima:—

"Who could refuse to give him all her heart?
Not I, who but for this o'ermastering love
Perchance had been a convert to the Cross,
But, wooed by Orosman, I all forgot.
I see but him, and my enraptured soul
Brims o'er with bliss to find itself adored.
Call up in your own thought his feats, his grace,
That powerful arm which many kings hath crushed,
That charming brow whence glory radiates.
I speak not of the sceptre he confers;
No, gratitude were but a small return,
A slighting tribute, all too poor for love—
My heart craves Orosman and not his crown.
I may too easily believe his flame;
But if the heavens had been harsh to him,
Condemning him to chains that I have borne,
And placing Syria's realm beneath my rule,

Either my love deceives, or Zaire[1] to-day
Would stoop as low to raise him to her side."

Nor is the Soldan less impassioned in his vows. After telling her of his readiness to forego the customs of Mahometan kings, and to make her his only mistress and wife, he thus closes the speech :—

"I love you, Zaire, and from your soul expect
A love which answers my consuming flame.
My heart is one that owns not moderate joys ;
Faint love would make me think myself abhorred :
Such is the character of all my mind.
Boundless my wish to worship, solace you ;
If the same ardour glows within your breast,
At once I wed you—not on other terms ;
The perilous constraint of marriage-ties
Would be my bane if it were not your bliss."

It is at this moment that young Nerestan returns from France. He had brought with him the ransom of Zaire, Fatima, and the ten cavaliers. "I have redeemed my word," he said to the Soldan, "it is now for thee to hold to thine ; but know that I have exhausted my fortune in the purchase. Nothing but honourable poverty remains for me, and I am about to return to my bonds." The Soldan, admiring the courage of the Christian, and himself born for generous actions, remitted all the ransoms, gave him a hundred knights for ten, and loaded him with presents, but, at the same time, signified that Zaire could not be purchased, and was indeed above all price. Also he declined to give up among the redeemed a prince of Lusignan, captured long ago in Cæsarea.

This Lusignan, the last of the stock of the kings of Jerusalem, was an old man, venerated throughout the East, and whose name alone might be dangerous to the Saracens. It was he whom Nerestan had chiefly wished to redeem. The

[1] Zaïre, a dissyllable in the French play, is made a monosyllable here, as being more euphonious to English ears and better suited to English verse.

youth appeared before Orosman overwhelmed with the double refusal. The Soldan observed his trouble, and experienced from that moment the beginnings of a jealousy which the generosity of his character enabled him to stifle; however, he ordered that the hundred cavaliers should be ready to set out with Nerestan next day.

Zaire, on the point of becoming sultana, wished to give Nerestan one proof of gratitude; she threw herself at Orosman's feet to beg liberty for old Lusignan. Orosman could deny her nothing; the captive was brought from his prison. The redeemed Christians were with Nerestan in the outer courts of the seraglio, weeping the doom of Lusignan; above all, the Chevalier de Chatillon, the close friend of the unfortunate prince, could not make up his mind to accept that freedom which was refused to his master,—when Zaire entered among them, bringing with her him whom they had despaired of seeing more.

Lusignan, dazzled with the light, which he had been deprived of during twenty years of captivity, could scarcely endure it, not knowing where he was, nor whither they were conducting him. Seeing at last that he was among his countrymen, and recognising Chatillon, he gives way to the joy mingled with bitterness which the wretched feel in their consolations. He inquires to whom he owes his deliverance. Zaire, presenting Nerestan, answers that it is to him that all the Christians owe their liberty. When the old man learns that Nerestan has been brought up in the seraglio with Zaire, he beseeches them to tell him of the fate of his children. "Two," he says, "were seized in the cradle when I was taken in Cæsarea; two others, with their mother, were killed before my eyes. I have heard that my youngest son and my daughter were brought to this seraglio. Have you, Nerestan, Zaire, Chatillon, no knowledge of what has become of these sad remains of the race of Godfrey and of Lusignan?"

While he thus questioned them, he perceived on Zaire's arm an ornament enclosing a cross, and remembered that his daughter had worn such when carried to the font—Chatillon had placed it on her—and she had been snatched from his

arms before she could be baptised. The likeness in feature, the age, the scar of a hurt his little son had received, all convinced Lusignan that he still had children in Zaire and Nerestan. Nature spoke to the hearts of all three at once, and expressed itself in tears. "Embrace me, my dear children," cried Lusignan, "and look once more on your father." Zaire and Nerestan could not tear themselves from his arms. "But alas!" exclaimed this unhappy old man, "shall I taste an unmixed joy? Heaven that restores my daughter, does it restore her as a Christian?" At these words Zaire blushed and trembled, and avowed herself a Mahometan. Grief, religion, and nature lent strength at this moment to Lusignan: he embraced his daughter, pointing to the Holy Sepulchre; and animated by despair, by zeal, and aided by so many Christians and by his son, he strongly moved her. She cast herself at his feet and promised to become a Christian.

Thus far Voltaire; and this will appear, to most, the doubtful point of the play. How people may feel who unexpectedly see for the first time their nearest relations, of whose existence they had remained in ignorance, is a problem which few can solve; but we may be tolerably certain that a young girl such as Zaire would be unlikely to renounce her lover and change her faith in a moment, at the bidding of a newly-found father. However, if this difficulty be tided over—in which good acting might greatly help—things go smoothly through the rest of the plot:—

At this moment comes an officer to separate Zaire from her father and brother, and to arrest all the French knights, and, as Lusignan is removed, he binds her by an oath to secrecy. This sudden severity was the result of a council held by Orosman. St Louis's fleet had sailed from Cyprus—as was feared, for the Syrian coast; but a second courier having brought the news of the departure of St Louis for

Egypt, Orosman was reassured, for he was himself the enemy of the Soldan of that country. Thereupon he ordered that the Frenchmen should be sent to their king, and now thought only of repairing by the magnificence of his nuptials the wrong which in his anger he had done to Zaire.

"Whilst the preparations were made, Zaire, in grief, asked permission from the Soldan to see Nerestan once more. Orosman, too glad of an occasion to please her, was so indulgent as to permit the interview. Nerestan saw Zaire, but it was to tell her that her father was ready to expire; and that, in his last moments, his joy at having recovered his children was mingled with sorrow at not knowing whether she would become a Christian; and that, while dying, he had ordered her to be baptised that day by the Pontiff of Jerusalem. Zaire, melted and overcome, promised everything, and swore to her brother that she would be a Christian, that she would not marry Orosman, and that to be baptised should be her first care.

Scarcely had she given this promise when Orosman, more amorous and more beloved than ever, comes to conduct her to the mosque. Never had any one a heart more torn than Zaire's; she was drawn one way by her family ties, her name, her new faith—and another by the best of men, who adored her. She no longer knew herself; she gave way to grief, escaped from the arms of her lover, and, quitting him in despair, left him overwhelmed with surprise, grief, and anger.

The suspicions of jealousy were reawakened in the heart of Orosman. Pride prevented them from appearing, but his suppressed indignation thus shows itself in their next interview:—

"Lady, time was when my enchanted soul,
Listening, unshamed, to dictates all too dear,
Found glory in submission to your chains.
I deemed myself beloved, and, sooth, your lord,
At your feet sighing, well might look for love!
I will not, like a jealous, doting fool,
Give vent to anger in resentful words

Stabbed cruelly, yet for complaint too proud,
For poor pretence too generous, too great,
I come to tell you that a cold disdain
Will be of your caprice the fit award.
Attempt not to deceive my tenderness,
To seek for arguments whose glozing art,
Veiling repugnance with illusive tints,
Might lure a lover back who still were blind ;
Who in his dread of shame would fain refuse
To know the cause that bids you outrage him.
Lady, 'tis past : another shall ascend
The throne my love has deigned to offer you ;
Another will have eyes, and know, at least,
What value on my heart and hand to set.
Fixed my resolve, though it may cost me dear.
Know Orosman is capable of all ;
Rather, far rather, would I lose you now
And die afar, distracted with the loss,
Than hold you mine, if to your wavering faith
It costs one sigh that is not breathed for me.
Go—never more will I behold your charms.

"ZAIRE.

"O God, who seest my tears, Thou hast reft all ;
Thou only wouldst possess my wildered soul !
Well, since 'tis true I am no longer loved,
My lord—

"OROSMAN.

"It is too true, as honour bids,
That I adored, that I abandon you,
That I renounce you, that you so desire,
That other laws presiding. . . Zaire, you weep ?"

"Zaire, you weep ?" seems to have been the great point of the play. "These words," says Voltaire, "make a grand effect on our stage."

Zaire's love increases with the indulgent tenderness of her lover. She casts herself in tears at his feet and beseeches him to defer the marriage till the morrow. She calculates that her brother will then be gone—that she will have received baptism—that she will have acquired the strength to resist; she even flatters herself that the Christian religion will permit her to love a man so generous, so virtuous, to whom nothing is wanting but to be a Christian. Struck with these ideas she speaks to Orosman with a tenderness so natural, a grief so genuine, that he yields again, and agrees to live this one day without her. He was sure of being loved, was happy in the thought, and shut his eyes to all else.

He had, however, in the first movements of jealousy, ordered the seraglio to be closed to all Christians. Nerestan, finding it shut, and not suspecting the cause, wrote a pressing letter to Zaire desiring her to open the secret door leading to the mosque, and recommending her to be faithful to her word. The letter fell into the hands of a guard, who carried it to Orosman. The Soldan could scarcely believe his eyes; he no longer doubted his own misfortune and the criminality of Zaire. To have loaded a stranger, a captive, with benefits; to have given his heart, his crown, to a slave-girl; to live only for her, and to be betrayed by her; to be deceived by the semblance of the tenderest affection; to experience at once the most violent love, the blackest ingratitude, and the vilest perfidy,—was, without doubt, a horrible condition; but Orosman wished to find her innocent. He sent the letter to her by an unknown slave. He flattered himself that she would not listen to Nerestan, who alone seemed to him guilty. He ordered that he should be arrested and bound, and went himself at the hour appointed to the place of rendezvous to await the effect of the letter.

The letter is delivered to Zaire: she reads it trembling, and after long hesitating, tells the slave that she will expect Nerestan, and orders that he shall be admitted. Of all this the slave informs Orosman.

The unhappy Soldan goes wild with grief. Weeping,

he draws his dagger. In the darkness Zaire comes to the rendezvous. Orosman, hearing her voice, lets his dagger fall. She draws near—she calls upon Nerestan, and at that name Orosman stabs her.

At that moment Nerestan is brought in, in chains, with Fatima. Orosman, beside himself, addresses Nerestan, whom he terms his rival: "'Tis thou who tearest Zaire from me," he said; "look on her before she dies. Let your punishment begin with hers." Nerestan approaches the body. "What do I see? My sister! Barbarian, what hast thou done?" At the word sister, Orosman is as a man who wakes from a deadly dream; he knows his error—he sees all he has lost—he is too deeply plunged in horror to complain. Nerestan and Fatima speak to him, but he understands nothing of what they say except that he was loved. He calls on Zaire—runs to her—they stop him—he falls back in the stupor of despair. "What is to be my doom?" said Nerestan. After a long silence the Soldan orders his fetters to be taken off, loads him and the other Christians with presents, and then kills himself beside Zaire.

This play, translated by Aaron Hill, a gentleman who was once manager of Drury Lane, and wrote a tragedy with the appalling title of "The Fatal Vision," was acted in London in 1735. Mrs Cibber (daughter-in-law of Colley Cibber), then only eighteen, made her first appearance as Zaire, and achieved an extraordinary degree of success. A young gentleman "of fortune and condition" made an equally decided failure as Orosman. The play long retained its place on the list at Covent Garden, where Master Betty (who died only a year or two ago) acted Orosman, and Charles Kemble, Nerestan. Played by good actors, it was no doubt capable of producing strong effects of the kind to which our grandfathers were perhaps more sensitive than we are—effects quite

consistent with the conventional and declamatory style of the English as well as French tragedians of the time.

Voltaire continued to write tragedies up to the end of his life, producing twenty-six in all, of which the concluding specimen, from one of the most popular of many that were eminently successful, has now been given.

The reader who knows his Shakespeare, and who studies a tragedy or two of Voltaire, or Addison's "Cato," will see that there are two very different principles on which to write a play. One is, to regard it as a picture of life; to give to the characters some of the individuality of real men and women—that individuality of course being made to suit and strengthen the plot; to disregard time and space, so as to obtain latitude for the free development of story and of character; to call on the spectator of the drama for the many concessions required to meet the exigencies which these conditions entail; to mix, as in life, high with low, laughter with tears, rude jests with sublime sentiments; and to make the language and manners of the characters correspond with them in their range from the lover, the patriot, the tyrant, down to the knave, the jester, and the sot. This, the Shakespearian method, admits so many side-lights from the world without, as to impart a spacious, open-air character to the drama, as if the stage were merely an eddy in the great tide of human affairs which sweeps past almost within sight and hearing.

The Voltairian drama (the drama of the ancients, and of Corneille and Racine) makes illusion and situation its chief aims. The time occupied by the action of the story is the same as that occupied by the performance of the

piece; the scene does not shift—the spectators are to be persuaded that they are looking at a crisis in the affairs of the characters which would naturally reach its catastrophe in the time during which they observe it. Nothing is admitted that does not tend to the development of the plot; every speech is directed to that end. This naturally gives to the whole piece an air of isolation, as if the characters had no other business in life than what they are doing on the stage. What Voltaire's characters say is always effective, the language vigorous, the matter directly to the point; but no picture is given either of manners, or the times, or of human life.

It is not attempted here to decide which method is the better adapted to the stage. There can be no question which gives more pleasure and profit to the reader of a play. The opportunities for such wisdom and wit and poetry as shall be of general application, to be quoted, and remembered, and put by for use, must necessarily be much fewer when the energy of the dramatist is absorbed in the action of the piece, under conditions which tax all his art and ingenuity. The principle of maintaining an elevation above the level of common life excludes a vast range of Shakespearian characters—not only the grave-diggers and clowns and jesters, but many to whom we accord high rank in the serious drama: Shylock, and Cassio, and Kent, and even Lear himself, would all be pronounced unsuitable, even monstrous. But on the other hand, the Voltairian method intensifies the interest—the attention of the audience is focussed upon effective situations leading up to the catastrophe. Want of individuality even might be defended on the ground that, as ready-made suits ought to fit average and not excep-

tional people, so it is easier to find good representatives of parts in which the actor can adapt the part to himself, than of those in which he must adapt himself to the part. Many Zaires and Alzires might be found for one Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra. In all that he aimed at—in versification, language, situation, and stage effect—Voltaire was one of the most successful of dramatists. A note in Forster's 'Life of Goldsmith' says: "Gray placed Voltaire's tragedies next to those of Shakespeare. . . . Gray's high opinion of Voltaire's tragedies is shared by one of the greatest authorities on such matters now living, Sir E. B. Lytton, whom I have often heard maintain the marked superiority of Voltaire over all his countrymen in the knowledge of dramatic art, and the power of producing theatrical effect."

CHAPTER XI.

LETTERS ON THE ENGLISH.

The untiring and audacious pen of our author soon brought him into trouble which more than counterbalanced the popularity acquired through his tragedy. In his "Temple of Taste" (a satirical poem) he not only treated the most respected names in French literature—Racine, Corneille, Boileau—with a freedom of criticism which, however honest and fair, seemed to their admirers disrespectful, but dealt out to his contemporaries what he (but not they) considered justice. "The work," he says, "has roused up against me all those whom I have not praised sufficiently to their mind, and still more those whom I have not praised at all." The publication of the "Epistle to Uranie," written ten years before, and which, as has been said, he attempted to disown, inflamed yet more the animosity which raged against him. Yet he was at the same time engaged in adding to his "Letters on the English," then nearly ready for publication, an attack on the "Thoughts" of Pascal, which would be fuel to the fire. He had intrusted the work to a printer of Rouen for publication. But he long hesitated to publish it for fear of the consequences,

and felt his way carefully by gaining opinions about it. "I have read," he says, "to Cardinal Fleury two letters on the Quakers which I had taken great care to cut and trim, so as not to frighten his devout and sage Eminence. He has found what was left pleasant enough, but the poor man does not know what he has lost." Finally, the Rouen publisher, instigated by the hope of profit which Voltaire's extraordinary repute promised, gave them to the world without the permission of the author. The opposition they aroused was even more violent than Voltaire had anticipated,—the publisher was sent to the Bastille; the whole edition was seized and burnt by order of the Parliament; and the author, finding that another warrant was out against him, found it necessary to seek concealment. "I fear much," he says, "that in present circumstances a fatal blow may be dealt me. There are times when one may do anything with impunity; at others nothing is blameless. It is my hap to experience the hardest treatment for the most frivolous causes. Yet, in two months from this, I might possibly print the Koran without censure." The reader who considers the specimens of these terrible letters, about to be given, will probably agree with Voltaire that it was the writer rather than the book that was the object of such unreasonable persecution.

It is easy to see how a discussion on the various religious sects to be found in England might be made to convey reflections on the Catholic priesthood. He begins with the Quakers. "It seems to me," he says, "that the doctrine and history of a people so remarkable as the Quakers deserve the curiosity of a reasonable man." He had therefore sought an interview with "one of the

most celebrated Quakers of England," whose name, it appears, was Andrew Pitt, and who received him in due Quaker fashion. In reply to Voltaire, he explains and justifies by texts the peculiarities of the sect; why they do not acknowledge the efficacy of the two sacraments—why they have no ministers of their religion—why they refuse to address others with salutations and titles, to take oaths, and to serve in war—and why they wear a particular dress.

"You see," comments Voltaire, "how my holy man misused, plausibly enough, three or four passages of sacred writ which seemed to favour his sect, forgetting, in perfect good faith, a hundred passages which crush it. I took good care to contest nothing—there is nothing to gain by disputing with an enthusiast: it is not expedient either to tell a lover of the faults of his mistress, or an advocate of the weakness of his cause, or to talk of reason to one who has spiritual light—so I passed to other matters. . . . I see the sect dying out every day in London. In every country the dominant religion, when it abstains from persecution, swallows up all the others in the end."

On the whole, he treats the Quakers very tenderly, as if he liked them. Nevertheless, what he said about them did not satisfy Andrew Pitt, who afterwards wrote to the author to complain that he had a little embellished the facts of the interview, and "to assure him that God was displeased at his having passed jests on the Quakers."

His next essay, on the Anglican Church, begins by saying, "England is the country of sects: in my Father's house there are many mansions. An Englishman goes to heaven, like a free man, by the road that pleases him." He then gives a satirical sketch of the clergy, such as

Fielding might have written without being accused of particular irreverence :—

"The Anglican clergy have retained many Catholic ceremonies, and, above all, that of receiving tithes, with scrupulous exactness. They have also the pious ambition which makes them desire to be the masters ; for what vicar does not want to be pope in his own village ?" "With respect to morals, the English clergy is better regulated than that of France." This he ascribes to our universities, and to the fact that "they are not called to the dignities of the Church till very late, and at an age when men have no other passions than avarice. Besides, the priests are nearly all married, and the awkward manners contracted at the university, and the little they enjoy of female society there, are the causes why a bishop is ordinarily obliged to be content with his own wife. The priests go sometimes to the tavern because custom allows it; and if they get tipsy, it is with gravity and without scandal."

"That indefinable being who is neither churchman nor layman—in one word, an *abbé*—is a species unknown in England. The clergy are all set apart, and nearly all pedants. When they hear that in France young men noted for profligacy, and raised to the prelacy by the intrigues of women, make love publicly, cheer themselves with love-songs, give elaborate dinners, and then go to implore the light of the Holy Spirit, boldly calling themselves successors to the apostles—they thank heaven they are Protestants. But these are, as Master Francis Rabelais says, nothing but vile heretics, to be burnt and sent to all the devils—which is the reason why I do not concern myself at all in their affairs."

Presbyterianism fares no better :—

"It is nothing but pure Calvinism, such as had been established in France, and now exists at Geneva. As the clergy of this sect have only very middling salaries from their Church, and consequently cannot live like bishops, they have taken the natural course of exclaiming against honours to

which they cannot attain. Figure to yourself the proud Diogenes, who trampled on the pride of Plato—the Scotch Presbyterians do not ill resemble that haughty and beggarly reasoner. They treated their king Charles II. with much less respect than Diogenes showed for Alexander; for when they took up arms for him against Cromwell, who had betrayed them, they made that unfortunate king undergo four sermons a-day.

"Compared with a young and lively French bachelor, gabbling in the morning in the schools of theology, and in the evening carolling with ladies, an Anglican theologian is a Cato; but this Cato would seem a gay youth by the side of a Scotch Presbyterian. He affects a grave deportment, an afflicted air, carries an immense hat, a long cloak over a short coat, preaches through his nose, and gives the name of 'harlot of Babylon' to all Churches in which some ecclesiastics are lucky enough to have two thousand a-year, and where the people are good enough to suffer it, and to call them 'Monseigneur,' 'Your Grandeur,' 'Your Eminence.'

"While the Episcopal and Presbyterian sects are the two dominant ones in Great Britain, all the others are welcome, and live well enough together; while most of their preachers hate each other reciprocally with nearly as much cordiality as that with which a Jansenist damns a Jesuit."

And he winds up this letter by saying—

"If there were but one religion in England, its despotism would be formidable; if there were only two, they would throttle each other; but there are thirty, and they live happily and peaceably."

In the same vein he treats other persuasions, and then passes to the Government. He compares the Senates of England and of Rome, and finds no resemblance in them except—

"That in London some members of Parliament are suspected, no doubt wrongfully, of selling their votes on occa-

sion, as was done in Rome. The horrible folly of a war of religion was never known among the Romans; that abomination was reserved for the devout preachers of humility and patience. Pompey and Cæsar, Antony and Augustus, did not fight in order to decide whether the high priest should wear his robe over his shirt or his shirt over his robe."

This, he says, the English have done, though he thinks they never will be guilty of such folly again. He then goes on to draw a comparison between the Governments of Rome and of England altogether to our advantage, and in which he ceases to be sarcastic:—

"The fruit of civil wars in Rome has been slavery—in England, liberty. The English have shed a great deal of blood, no doubt, in their struggles for liberty; but others have shed as much, with the result only of cementing their bonds.

"That which becomes a revolution in England is only a sedition in other countries. A city takes up arms to defend its privileges, whether in Spain, Barbary, or Turkey; immediately mercenary soldiers subjugate it, executioners punish it, and the rest of the nation kisses the rod. The French think the government of this isle of Britain more stormy than the sea which surrounds it, and this is true—but it is when the king begins the tempest, by wishing to make himself master of the vessel of which he is only chief pilot. The civil wars of France have been longer, more cruel, more fertile in crime, than those of England; but not one of them has had for its object a wise liberty."

After describing the condition of the country in the time of King John—

"Whilst the barons, the bishops, the popes, thus tore to pieces the land where each wished to rule, the people, the most useful and even the most virtuous part of a community of men, composed of those who study laws and sciences, of

merchants, artisans, lastly of labourers, who exercise the first and most despised of callings—the people, I say, were regarded by them as animals below man. It was far from advisable that these should have part in the government—they were villeins; their labour, their blood, belonged to their masters, who called themselves nobles. The great majority in Europe was what it still is in many countries—serfs of a lord, a species of cattle bought and sold with the land. Ages were necessary to do justice to humanity—to perceive that it was horrible that the great number should sow and the small number reap; and is it not happy for the French that the authority of these minor brigands has been extinguished in France by the legitimate power of the kings, as it has been in England by that of king and people?"

This last sentence is one of his ironical touches. The state of the French peasantry was shocking, as nobody knew better than Voltaire; the "minor brigands," of whom, perhaps, the Chevalier Rohan-Chabot was one, were in full exercise of their oppressive privileges, and so became a chief cause of the Revolution.

"Everything proves," he says, "that the English are bolder and more philosophic than we. A good deal of time must elapse before a certain degree of reason and of intellectual courage can cross the Straits of Dover."

The remaining letters treat chiefly of our philosophers —Bacon, Locke, and Newton — of our Tragedy and Comedy, and of our poets and men of letters. The essay on Locke concludes thus:—

"It is neither Montaigne, nor Locke, nor Bayle, nor Spinosa, nor Hobbes, nor my Lord Shaftesbury, nor Mr Collins, nor Mr Toland, &c., who have lighted the torch of discord in their country; it is, for the most part, those theologians who, having had first the ambition of being chiefs of a sect,

have very soon aspired to be chiefs of a party. All the books of modern philosophers put together will never make as much noise in the world as was once caused by the dispute of the Franciscans about the shape of their sleeve and their hood."

The reader will think that there is nothing that we have quoted which could be supposed worthy of imprisonment or persecution; yet there is no doubt that Voltaire's apprehensions were but too well founded. Constantly impelled by his active and clear-sighted intellect to combat what he considered to be abuses, he was often induced to withhold from publication what he had written, because he was not prepared to undergo martyrdom for his opinions; and thus it is that many of his works, after lying in his desk for years, and being made known only to intimate friends, slipt into the world, either through a foreign press, or because the hope of profiting by the fame of the great writer had tempted some knavish publisher to get surreptitious possession of a manuscript, and to print it without the author's sanction. With his eagerness for fame this suppression of his writings was a source of mortification, while to one so excitable of temperament the apprehension of arrest was vexatious in extreme degree; and the twofold annoyance thus inflicted naturally aggravated his animosity against the priests, whom he considered the chief authors of the persecution. But, besides personal resentment, there is no doubt that his very genuine philanthropy also prejudiced him against the clergy: he honestly believed that superstition and fanaticism had caused the greatest calamities and bloodiest wars which history tells of; the religion of his persecutors appeared to him as necessarily a

superstitious and fanatical religion; and hence he was constantly impelled to provoke the fresh exercise of their arbitrary authority by the indignation which his former injuries had aroused in him. His desire to enjoy free utterance had often led him to contemplate a voluntary exile, and was very strong in him now. "When I gave permission," he says, "to Thiriot, two years ago, to print these cursed letters, I had arranged to quit France, and to go to enjoy in a free country the greatest delight I know, and the best right of humanity, which is to be dependent on law only, not on the caprice of man. I was very resolute in this idea: friendship alone made me entirely change my determination, and has rendered this country dearer to me than I had hoped for." The particular friendship alluded to forms, as we shall now see, a main element in this epoch of his life.

CHAPTER XII.

MADAME DU CHÂTELET.

BESIDES this craving after liberty of expression, his desire to devote himself to letters, in the abstract, was extraordinarily powerful. It was by far his strongest passion, and, in fact, absorbed and turned to its own account all the others. "Heavens, my dear Cideville!" he exclaims, "what a delicious life to find one's self living with three or four literary people who have talents but no jealousy—to live thus in harmony, to cultivate our art, to talk it over, to enlighten each other! I fancy I may live some day in such a little paradise." Notwithstanding the extraordinary industry and success which had thus far distinguished him, he must have felt that the life he had led of late, one of constant evasion—the life, in fact, of a bird of passage, whose periods of migration were altogether uncertain and fortuitous—diversified by intervals when he figured as a man of pleasure—was, to say nothing of its discomfort, at variance with his true vocation. He now perceived an opportunity of quitting the frivolities and dissipation of Paris, and of living in comfort and security in a spot so near the French frontier that a single step would place him beyond

the grasp of arbitrary and capricious power, while he would at the same time enjoy the solace of the most congenial female society which, perhaps, all France could supply to him. This opportunity, of which he immediately took advantage, consisted in retiring to the country house of the Marquis du Châtelet, on the verge of Lorraine, along with the Marquis's wife :—

"I was tired," he says, "of the idle, turbulent life of Paris, of the crowd of dandies, of bad books printed with the approbation and privilege of the king, of the cabals of literary people, of the baseness and dishonesty of the scum who dishonour letters. I found in 1733 a young lady who thought much as I did, and who took the resolution to pass several years in the country, and there to cultivate her mind, far from the tumult of the world : this was the Marquise du Châtelet, the woman who was the most disposed to study the sciences of any in France. Her father, the Baron de Breteuil, had made her learn Latin, which she knew as well as Madame Dacier ; she had by heart the choice passages of Horace, Virgil, and Lucretius ; all the philosophical works of Cicero were familiar to her. But of all studies, she preferred mathematics and metaphysics."

Nor is this the testimony merely of a too partial admirer—critics of unimpeachable judgment confirm it. "She really took a high place in letters and philosophy," says St Beuve, "and retained the admiration of Voltaire, who was not the man to let his intellect be for long the dupe of his heart."

Madame du Châtelet, twelve years younger than Voltaire, who was not yet forty, was then about twenty-seven. Although an enemy of hers, Madame du Deffant, has left an unfavourable portrait of her, there is no doubt that she was in person as well as in mind an extremely

attractive woman. She was a tall dark beauty, with very pretty features, and a countenance of much individuality. Unlike learned ladies in general, she had a very strong leaning towards a life of pleasure: society, operas, balls, suppers, the gaming-table, flirtation—all these she enjoyed with uncommon zest. She had been married young to the Marquis du Châtelet, a very uncongenial mate, who, having small taste for the sciences, pursued his own paths in other directions, and left his wife to hers. The Marquise, according to the custom of the time, had had a lover; and that lover, also according to the custom of the time, had been the Duke of Richelieu. The Duke had given her a ring containing his portrait, which she now replaced with the likeness of Voltaire, who evidently considered that he had at length sowed his wild oats, was turning over a new leaf, and was respectably settling himself in life, when he retired with his companion to Cirey. Everybody seemed to be of the same opinion; M. de Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet received and returned the visits of great people, and people of fashion, and learned people; they were frequent guests at the neighbouring Court of King Stanislaus; the lady's brother came to stay with them, and the too indulgent Marquis du Châtelet also gave them occasionally the sanction of his presence as a guest.

Cirey was a dilapidated mansion in Champagne, situated in a poor, barren district. None of Voltaire's extant letters give any description of the surrounding scenery —indeed, he seems to have had but a very commonplace perception of natural beauty. His income, now more than £3000 a-year, supplied the means of furnishing the chateau, and of embellishing it with gardens; with his

contributions, too, a gallery was built for pictures and statues, and a cabinet of objects of science formed. A set of apartments for Madame du Châtelet, and another for him, were fitted up with extraordinary taste and splendour. A guest who has left a record of her visit to Cirey, Madame de Grafigny, says that Voltaire's rooms were more like those of a prince than of a private gentleman. The rest of the mansion seems to have been left much in its former condition, which was the reverse of magnificent.

This was his home for fifteen years, from 1734 to 1749—his abode there being, however, varied by frequent visits to Paris, to Brussels, and to Berlin. While at Cirey, both he and Madame du Châtelet studied and wrote perseveringly. He was, Madame de Grafigny says, so greedy of his time, so intent upon his work, that it was sometimes necessary to tear him from his desk for supper. "But when at table he always has something to tell, very facetious, very odd, very droll, which would often not sound well except in his mouth, and which shows him still as he has painted himself for us—

'Always one foot in the coffin,
The other performing gambades.'

To be seated beside him at supper, how delightful!" Reading aloud, the performance of comedies and tragedies, marionettes, and magic-lantern, exhibited by Voltaire, *fêtes* — these were the chief diversions of the place. Their journeys to and from Cirey to Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere, generally made by night for economy of time, were performed in a huge carriage so crowded with trunks, baggage, and movables of all kinds, that it sometimes broke down on the road.

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CHAPTER XIII.

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

THE works of this period of his life exhibit to the full the extraordinary fertility of his mind, and the equally extraordinary facility with which he gave form and expression to his thoughts. The tragedies of "Alzire," "Zulime," "Mahomet," and "Merope," the comedy of the "Prodigal Son," many philosophical treatises, the "Seven Discourses on Man," in verse, the satire, also in verse, of the "Worldling," the "Essay on the Morals and Spirit of Nations," and the burlesque epic of the "Maid" (of Orleans), were the most considerable productions of these years.

The "Essay on the Morals and Spirit of Nations" was composed in 1740 for the edification of Madame du Châtelet, who complained that she had found modern history full of trivial and unauthenticated facts, while she had searched it in vain for pictures of manners, the origin of customs and laws, and the progress of humanity. Thereupon Voltaire undertook, as a delicate attention, what would have been to many a learned writer the work of a life, and is reckoned by some critics as his highest achievement. Bossuet had brought a universal

history down to the establishment of Charlemagne's empire, and at that point Voltaire took it up, and continued it down to the reign of Louis XIII. In his preface he sets forth his idea of what are the proper subjects of history, and how it should be written :—

"There is no object," he says, "in knowing in what year a prince unworthy of remembrance succeeded a barbarous ruler in a rude nation. . . . The more important it is to know of the great actions of sovereigns who have rendered their people better and happier, the more we should ignore the herd of kings who only load the memory."

Prefacing his essay by a sketch of earlier times, he dwells for a moment on the horrors from which, as he has so often insisted, civilisation has rescued the world. "Let us avert our eyes," he says, "from those times of savagery which are the shame of nature;" and then, after describing the horribly barbarous condition of the peoples of Germany and Gaul at the time when Cæsar was making war on them, he remarks:—

"See what Tacitus has the impudence to praise, in order to disparage the Court of the Roman Emperor by contrast with the virtues of the Germans. It is the part of a mind as just as yours [Madame du Châtelet's] to regard Tacitus as an ingenious satirist, no less profound in his ideas than concise in his expressions, who has written rather a criticism than a history of his own time, and who would have deserved the admiration of ours had he been impartial."

In after-years it seemed to him expedient to introduce his essay by another, which he called the "Philosophy of History," and they now appear as one work. In returning from his last visit to Prussia (to be hereafter adverted to), he passed some time at the Abbey of Sénones, and

there he found many rare and precious works, of which, with even more than his accustomed diligence, he took advantage, giving himself, for the time, entirely up to study, and accumulating materials with which he vastly increased the value of the next edition of his essay. "I had chalked," he says in a letter, "the portrait of the human race in profile—here you will see it painted in three-quarters." The vast reading necessary for the work is disguised by the ease and simplicity of the style; and, in order to realise the extraordinary labour which it implies, it is necessary for the modern reader to bear in mind that Voltaire led the way in paths that, now well trodden and familiar, were then enveloped in darkness. It is rendered less flowing and imposing, but more lucid, by being divided into short chapters, each forming an essential but distinct portion of the argument and narrative. Many problems which are discussed and disputed by the philosophers of our day, are here briefly, clearly, and confidently stated. He is, as we have seen, no believer in savage virtue, or in the nobility sometimes deemed to be the accompaniment of a state of pure nature, and strongly insists that every nation has had its beginning in a condition approaching, and in many respects inferior, to that of brutes. "The reason is, that it is not in the nature of man *to desire that which he does not know.* Not only a prodigious extent of time, but fortunate conditions also, are necessary in order that man may raise himself above the life of animals." In the spirit, though not with the full knowledge, of a modern geologist and ethnologist, he speaks of the great changes of the earth's surface, and their influence on the races of men. The gradual formation of societies and of languages is briefly but pithily

noted. Some short extracts from early chapters will illustrate the style and treatment :—

"A long period elapsed before men of singular endowments formed and taught to others the first rudiments of an imperfect and barbarous language, which had not, however, been necessary to the establishment of some degree of society. There were even entire nations which had never succeeded in forming a regular language, or gaining a distinct pronunciation : such were the Troglodytes, according to Pliny ; such are still the tribes about the Cape of Good Hope. But what a distance between this barbarous jargon and the art of painting one's thoughts !

. . . . . .

"The most populous countries were doubtless the warm climates, where man found easy and abundant nourishment in the cocoas, dates, pine-apples, and rice which grew of themselves. It is very likely that India, China, and the borders of the Euphrates and Tigris, were thickly populated when the rest of the globe was almost a desert. In our northern climates, on the contrary, it was much easier to encounter a herd of wolves than a society of men.

"The capture of Constantinople alone sufficed to crush the spirit of ancient Greece. The genius of the Romans was destroyed by the Goths. The coasts of Africa, once so flourishing, are now only the haunts of banditti. Still greater changes have taken place in climates less favourable. Physical have joined with moral causes ; for if the ocean has not entirely changed its bed, it has, at least, alternately covered and abandoned vast regions. Nature has been exposed to many scourges, many vicissitudes. The fairest, the most fertile territories of western Europe, all the low lands watered by rivers, have been covered with the ocean during a prodigious multitude of ages.

. . . . . .

"What notion had the earliest peoples of the 'soul'? That which our rustics have before they have learned their Catechism, or even afterwards. They get only a confused idea

upon which they never reflect. Nature has been too compassionate to make metaphysicians of them; this Nature is always and everywhere the same. She makes the original societies of men feel that there is something superior to man when they experience extraordinary calamities. She also makes them perceive that there is in man something which acts and thinks. They do not distinguish this faculty from that of life; and the word *soul* always signifies life with the ancients, whether Syrians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Greeks, or those who came at last to establish themselves in a part of Phœnicia.

"By what degrees could the step be gained of imagining, in our physical being, another being which is metaphysical? Certainly, men solely occupied with their wants could not know enough to fancy themselves philosophers. In course of time societies were formed, a little civilised, in which a small number might have sufficient leisure to reflect. It might happen that a man who deeply felt the death of his father, brother, or wife, would see in a dream the person whom he lamented. Two or three dreams of this kind would disquiet a whole tribe. Here is a dead person appearing to the living, yet the decaying body is still in its place. It is, then, something which was in the departed, and which walks abroad; it is his soul, his shade, an airy figure of himself. Such is the natural reasoning of ignorance which begins to reason. This opinion is that of all the earliest times that we know of, and must therefore have been the opinion of those that we know not of.

"The idea of a purely immaterial being could not present itself to minds which knew only of matter. Smiths, carpenters, masons, and labourers, were necessary before a man could exist who would have leisure to meditate. All the arts of handicraft have doubtless, by many ages, preceded metaphysics.

"Let us remark, in passing, that in the middle age of Greece, in the time of Homer, the soul was nothing but an aerial image of the body. Ulysses sees, in hell, shades, spirits. Could he possibly see pure spirits?

"We will examine, by-and-by, how the Greeks borrowed from the Egyptians the ideas of hell, and the apotheosis of the dead; how they believed, like other peoples, in a second life, without suspecting the spirituality of the soul. On the contrary, they could not imagine how an incorporeal being could feel good or ill. And I know not if Plato is not the first who has spoken of a purely spiritual being. That is, perhaps, one of the greatest efforts of the human intellect. Yet the spirituality of Plato is still strongly contested; and the greater part of the fathers of the Church, Platonists as they are, consider the soul as corporeal.

"When, after a great number of ages, some societies were established, it is probable that there was some sort of religion, of rude worship. Men, then solely occupied with the care of sustaining life, could not rise to the Author of life; they could not discern that concert of all parts of the universe, those means, and those innumerable ends which speak to wise men of an Eternal Architect. The knowledge of a God who designs, rewards, and avenges is the fruit of cultivated reason."

He goes on to show how local tutelary deities arose:—

'To know how all these worships, or superstitions, were established, it seems to me that we must follow the march of the human intellect when left to itself. A village inhabited by those who are almost savages, sees the fruits that fed it perish; an inundation destroys some of the huts; the lightning burns others. Who has done them this evil? It cannot be their neighbours, for all suffer alike. It is then some secret power; this has injured them, and this must therefore be appeased. And how? by serving it, as we serve those we wish to please,—by making it little presents. There is a serpent in the neighbourhood—it may very likely be this serpent. Milk is therefore placed near his cave; he thenceforward becomes sacred; his aid is invoked when there is war with a neighbouring village, which, on its side, has chosen another protector. Other small populations find themselves

in the same case. But, having no object which fixes their fear or their adoration, they call the being whom they suspect of having worked them ill by the general title of Master, Lord, Chief, Ruler."

Tribes or nations next acknowledge, and even naturalise, each other's gods. Then, but after a long interval, came the apotheosis of great men: the supposed son of a god became himself a god.

"One might write volumes on this subject, but all would reduce themselves to two sentences: it is, that the mass of the human race has been, and long will be, senseless and imbecile; and perhaps the most senseless of all have been they who have wished to find sense in these absurd fables, and to place reason in folly.

"Nature being everywhere the same, men have of necessity adopted the same truths and errors in those matters which are the objects of the senses, and which most strike the imagination. All have attributed the noise and effects of thunder to the power of a superior being inhabiting the air. Peoples bordering on the sea, finding high tides inundating their lands at the full of the moon, have thereupon believed that the moon was the cause of all that happened at the periods of its different phases.

"Amongst animals, the serpent appeared to them to be endowed with superior intelligence, because, seeing him cast his skin, they believed that he renewed his youth. By thus changing his skin he could maintain himself in perpetual youth — therefore he was immortal. Thus he became in Egypt and Greece the symbol of immortality. Large serpents living near fountains prevented the timid from approaching; very soon they were supposed to guard treasures. Thus a serpent guarded the apples of the Hesperides; another watched over the Golden Fleece."

Next came the distinction between malignant and tutelary powers; and then of expiation:—

"Water cleansed the stains of body and vestments, fire purified metals; therefore water and fire must purify souls. Thus no temple was without its salutary water and fire. Men plunged into the Ganges, the Indus, the Euphrates, at the time of the new moon and of eclipses; this immersion expiated sins. If they did not also purify themselves in the Nile, it is because the crocodiles would have eaten the penitents.

"Herodotus recounts in his simple way to the Greeks what the Egyptians had told him: but how is it that in speaking to him of nothing but prodigies they omitted to mention the famous plagues of Egypt; of the magical contest between the sorcerers of Pharaoh and the minister of the God of the Hebrews; and of an entire army swallowed up in the Red Sea, under waters raised like mountains to right and left to let the Hebrews pass, which in falling back drowned the Egyptians? It was, assuredly, the greatest event in the world's history; how is it, then, that neither Herodotus, nor Manethon, nor Eratosthenes, nor any other of the Greeks who were so fond of the marvellous, and always in correspondence with Egypt, has spoken of the miracles which ought to live in the memory of all generations. I do not make this reflection to shake the testimony of the Hebrew books, which I revere as I ought; I confine myself to expressing astonishment at the silence of all the Egyptians and all the Greeks. Providence doubtless does not wish that a history so divine should be transmitted to us by any profane hand.

. . . . . .

"Though the fall of angels transformed into devils was the foundation of the Jewish and the Christian religion, nothing is, nevertheless, said about it in Genesis, nor in the law, nor in any canonical book. Genesis says expressly that a serpent spoke to Eve and beguiled her. It is careful to remark that the serpent is the most subtle of animals; and we have already observed that all nations had this opinion of the serpent. Genesis notes especially that the hatred of men towards serpents springs from the ill office which that animal did the human race; that it is since that time that he endeav-

ours to bite us, and we try to crush him ; and that, finally, he is condemned for his evil conduct to crawl upon his belly and to eat the dust of the earth. It is true that earth forms no part of the serpent's food ; but all antiquity believed it."

He then takes a review of the creeds and customs of the most ancient nations known to history. One of these nations he distinguishes by special approval, another by special blame. In describing the Chinese, he admires the antiquity of their civilisation, which goes back four thousand years ; their annals, which record facts of history and nature instead of the fables which form the early chronicles of other nations; the paternal system by which their vast and populous empire is governed ; the absence of imposture in their religion ; their freedom from the fanaticism which inspires religious assassinations and religious wars; their industry and skill in manufactures; their superiority in certain branches of learning over all the other peoples of Asia ; their success in cultivating morals and laws; and, what was perhaps in his eyes their greatest merit, the fact that they had never been priest-ridden.

On the other hand, the Jewish nation excites in him special antipathy. He enumerates, with horror, the chief examples of that ruthless slaughter of their enemies which was part of their policy :—

"It is not to be wondered at," he says, "that the neighbouring nations united against the Jews, who in the mind of unenlightened people could only pass for execrable brigands, and not for the sacred instruments of divine vengeance and of the future safety of the human race."

After saying that they have never had a country of their own since the time of Vespasian, he remarks :—

"In following the historical thread of the petty Jewish

nation, it is seen that no other end was possible for it. It prided itself on having issued from Egypt like a horde of robbers, carrying off all that it had borrowed from the Egyptians; it was its glory never to have spared age or sex in the towns which it had captured. It dared to manifest an irreconcilable hatred for all other nations; it revolted against all its masters; always superstitious, always barbarous, abject in misfortune, and insolent in prosperity. Such were the Jews in the eyes of the Greeks and Romans, who could read their books; but in the eyes of Christians enlightened by faith, they have been our precursors, they have prepared the way for us, they have acted as the heralds of Providence."

A firm believer in the benefits of civilisation, Voltaire, in forming his estimate of the character of a nation, notes carefully the extent and success of its efforts to rise out of barbarism; a constant friend of humanity, he applauds the spirit of mercy and tolerance wherever he finds it; and himself an apostle of natural religion, he seeks carefully for all tokens of its existence, coming to the following conclusion:—

"A very pure religion existed among the nations whom we call Pagans, Gentiles, and Idolators, though the peoples and their priests followed shameful customs, childish ceremonies, and ridiculous doctrines, and though they even poured out human blood in honour of those imaginary gods whom their wise men despised and detested. This pure religion consisted in the recognition of the existence of a supreme God, of His providence, and His justice."

Arriving at the time of Charlemagne, he again takes a survey of the condition of all civilised nations—their religions, customs, and laws—and thence from epoch to epoch down to the age preceding his own, when he thus reviews his work in the same spirit which has directed him throughout:—

"The object has been the history of the human intellect, and not the detail of facts nearly always distorted: it was not intended, for instance, to inquire of what family the lord of Puiset, or the lord of Montlhéri, might be, who made war on the kings of France, but to trace the gradual advances from the barbarous rusticity of those days to the polish of ours.

. . . . . .

"In what a flourishing condition would Europe be without the continual wars which trouble it for very trifling interests, and often for petty caprices! To what a degree of perfection might agriculture have attained, and how widely might manufactures have spread comfort and ease throughout communities, if such astonishing numbers of useless men and women had not been buried in cloisters! A new humanity has tempered the scourge of war, softening its horrors, and still continuing to save nations from that destruction which appeared so imminently to menace them. It is indeed very deplorable to see such a multitude of soldiers maintained by all princes; but this evil produces good. The people do not now mix in the wars which their masters wage; the citizens of besieged towns often pass from one domination to another without loss of life to a single inhabitant; they are only the prize of him who has most soldiers, cannon, and money."

In all this the reader may perhaps discern a spirit which, at least in humanity and liberality, was in advance of his own time, and possibly of ours.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DIDACTIC POEM.

"THE 'Essay on Man' of Pope," says Voltaire, "appears to me the finest didactic poem, the most useful, the most sublime that has ever appeared in any language." It is probable that his high opinion of Pope's work, and the admiration he expressed for the writings of Boileau, inspired him with the wish to rival their success. What he respected so much in Pope's poem could scarcely have been its philosophy, though it contains much that harmonises with his own views in support of natural religion. Nobody can ever have been convinced or consoled by a homily which, addressing an imaginary opponent as "Presumptuous Man!" and the preacher's fellow-man as "Vile worm!" comforts the miserable with the assurance that their sufferings are part of a general scheme of perfect benevolence, and, with complacent superiority, rebukes the foolish for not being wise, and the unfortunate for not being happy. The task of explaining "the riddle of the painful earth" has been always too hard for philosophy; and such questions as that of free-will, of the balance of happiness, of the rela-

tive position of man in the universe, are rather exercises for ingenuity than problems for solution. Endeavours to answer them are too much (to borrow the words of an old writer) like the attempt "to draw the likeness of Proteus, or to define the figure of the fleeting air." Never has the wit of man devised a faith which is consistent with the facts of life, or which renders them clear to the hapless being who stumbles darkling among them. Nor can it be said that Voltaire has been more successful than others in this adventure, the special object of which in his case is to explain how the bestowal of happiness on man, seemingly so fortuitous, is yet consistent with divine justice. His First Discourse endeavours to establish that the measure of good and evil is equally dealt out to men in all conditions of life—a doctrine which, after all indispensable limitations, must remain of very doubtful authority. The next affirms the doctrine of free-will, and the deduction that, as man is free, his happiness rests with himself. The Third asserts that the chief obstacle to happiness is envy; the Fourth, that moderation is an essential element of happiness; the Fifth affirms, in opposition to the ascetics of the time, that pleasure is a gift of heaven, and its pursuit, within just limits, praiseworthy; the Sixth, that perfect happiness cannot be the lot of man in this world, and that the inevitable fact forms no just ground for complaint; and the Seventh, that virtue consists in promoting the happiness of our fellows, and not in vain practices of mortification. Some of these themes require no proof, some admit of none; and the reader may be apt to think that so original a mind might be better employed than in in-

genious attempts to solve either insoluble or self-evident propositions. But what both Voltaire and Pope have done in the matter, and what gives both of them a place among philosophic poets, is, that while conducting us along paths that lead to nowhere in particular, they invest with artistic and memorable interest a great deal of what is to be met with on the road. The "Essay on Man," of which nobody could explain the scheme or justify the logic, contains many passages which have permanently enriched the popular stock of thought, often even to the degree of endowing it with proverbs; and in the same way, the "Discourses on Man," which can never have had any influence on anybody's method of seeking happiness, have nevertheless contributed many striking verses and illustrations to French didactic poetry. But the styles of the two poets have not always much in common. Voltaire generally wants the condensity, the sharp effects, the careful, neat antitheses of Pope—for his compositions were always rapidly executed, and such attributes can only be, except by happy chance, the last results of the prolonged distillation of ideas and the fastidious selection of words; but these compositions possess all his characteristic ease and grace, and much happiness of illustration.

Whether there was any apparent novelty, or special force, for contemporary readers, in Voltaire's two first Discourses, is doubtful; but it is tolerably clear that they possess only small interest now. Into the third, however, his own experience infuses vigour: he who had all his life suffered from detraction, and had felt the keenest resentment against his calumniators, could scarcely treat

in abstract fashion the subject of Envy; and this "Discourse"[1] contains many keen personal allusions. It begins with the following passage, and ends with the next quoted, in which the reference to Desfontaines, Fréron, and the like venomous foes, is sufficiently apparent:—

"If man be free he should himself restrain,
If pressed by tyrants he should break the chain.
His vices are the despots of his breast,
Their fell dominion all too manifest.
Direst of these in its capricious hate,
The basest and the most inveterate,
Dealing with poisoned blade a coward blow,
Is Envy, of fair Fame the stealthy foe
Though born of Pride, it dreads the light of day,
Admits nor mercy's touch nor reason's ray,
Feels others' merit as a burthen vast,
And sinks beneath: so lies, 'neath Etna cast,
The giant, foe of gods, whom gods o'ercame,
Hurling in vain the fires that round him flame.
Blaspheming, writhing, in his earth-pent lair,
He thinks to shake the world with his despair;
Etna's vast load, by his huge heavings stirred,
Again subsides, and holds him sepulchred.
Courtiers I've seen, with pride of fools elate,
On conquering Villars turn the eye of hate;
They loathed the powerful arm, their surest stay;
He fought for them, they sneered his fame away.
Well might the hero, as the war drew near,
Tell Louis, 'Tis Versailles alone I fear;
Against your foes a dauntless front I bring;
Guard me from mine, for they stand near my king.'"

[1] The measure of the poem is, like that of the "Henriade," rhymed Alexandrines, which are here rendered in the ten-syllable lines of the "Essay on Man."

After many illustrations of Envy, in which his contemporaries figure, the "Discourse" concludes thus:—

"How grand, how sweet 'tis, to one's self to say,
'I have no enemies'! My rivals? Nay,
Their good, their ill, their honour's mine in part,
Their triumphs, too, for we are kin through Art.
Thus folds the gracious earth to bosom wide
These oaks, these pines, that flourish side by side;
With equal sap impels the grove to rise,
Rooting in Hades, branching to the skies,
Their trunks unmoved, their heads, as in disdain,
Bent back, defying all the tempest's strain;
Whom brotherhood makes time-proof. And, the while,
Under their spreading shade do serpents vile
Hiss, venting each on each a poison-flood,
And stain the roots with their detested blood."

The Discourse on "Moderation" contains much excellent though not very original advice, besides a lament that his own too-unrestrained desire to rise in the world should have led him to waste his time in courts. He thus lectures the Sybarites of Paris:—

"Ye who in pleasure's quest your hours employ,
Learn both to recognise it and enjoy!
Pleasures are flowers, which our Master's care
'Mid the world's briers makes to blossom fair;
Each has its season, and a later bloom
May still survive to cheer our winter's gloom.
In gathering them the touch should lightly rest,
Their fleeting beauty fades too eager pressed.
Do not, upon the palled sense, lavish cast
All Flora's sweets in one voluptuous blast!
Somewhat the wise still leave unfelt, unknown,
And, by abstaining, hold the joy their own.
Luckless the drone, with leisure's load oppressed,

Who ne'er with labour freshens failing zest;
Nature no favours will unbought bestow—
Spontaneous harvests spring not here below."

To the general rule of "Moderation" he, however, makes afterwards one happy exception :—

"Divinest Friendship! perfect happiness!
The one emotion that can bear excess."

CHAPTER XV.

FIRST VISITS TO FREDERICK.

By far the most notable feature of this, the Cirey epoch, was his intercourse with Frederick the Great. The association of these two, the most conspicuous men of their age, had its origin in the exalted admiration with which Voltaire's writings had inspired the prince. In August 1736, Frederick, then in his twenty-fifth year, and not yet king, was living at the chateau of Reinsberg, cultivating music, poetry, science, and literature, when, having as yet no cares of government on his mind, and believing the illustrious men of the age to be, of all men, those whom it were best to know and converse with, he wrote to Voltaire such a letter as a young enthusiast would write to one whose gifts he considered to be pre-eminent—prefacing with many splendid compliments the request for "all your writings," it being notorious that many more existed than had as yet seen the light. A fitting reply from the gratified poet helped to begin a correspondence which proceeded with sustained pleasantness for four years. In 1740, Frederick, now newly made king, being on a tour along the Rhine frontier, proposed to visit Voltaire, who was at Brussels;

but afterwards, excusing himself on the score of an attack of ague, he invited Voltaire to come to him instead, and the first meeting accordingly took place at Wesel.

"I saw," says Voltaire, "in a small room, by the light of a candle, a little mattress, two feet and a half wide, on which lay a little man wrapped up in a dressing-gown of coarse blue stuff: this was the king, who perspired and shivered under a wretched counterpane, in a violent access of fever.

"Having paid my respects, I began the acquaintance by feeling his pulse, as if I had been his first physician. The fit over, he dressed, and placed himself at table. Algarotti, Keyserling, Maupertuis, and the King's Envoy to the States-General, formed the supper-party, at which we discussed, to the very bottom, the questions of the immortality of the soul, of liberty, and of the Androgynes of Plato."

Voltaire spent three days here with the king:—

"I soon felt attached to him," he says; "the more that he was a king—always a very attractive circumstance for human weakness. In general, it is we literary people who flatter kings; but this one applauded me from top to toe, whilst the Abbé Desfontaines, and other rascals, libelled me in Paris at least once a-week."

The royal party continued its route, while Voltaire returned to Holland, whence he presently wrote to Maupertuis:—

"When we parted at Clèves, you going to the right, I to the left, I fancied myself at the last judgment, when the elect are separated from the condemned. *Divus Fredericus* says to you, 'Sit down at my right hand in the paradise of Berlin,' and to me, 'Depart, thou accursed, into Holland.'"

Frederick, on his side, was equally pleased with the meeting:—

"I have seen that Voltaire whom I was so curious to know. . . . He has the eloquence of Cicero, the mildness of Pliny, the wisdom of Agrippa; he combines, in short, what is to be collected of virtues and talents from the greatest men of antiquity. His intellect is at work incessantly; every drop of ink is a trait of wit from his pen. He declaimed his Mahomet to us — an admirable tragedy; he transported us out of ourselves; I could only admire him and hold my tongue. The Du Châtelet is lucky to have him; for, of the good things he flings out at random, a person who had no faculty but memory might make a brilliant book."

In the next three years Voltaire paid three other visits to Frederick. In December of the same year when they first met, he spent six days with the king at Reinsberg. "Voltaire," wrote Frederick, "has arrived, all sparkling with new beauties, and far more sociable than at Clèves." Again, in 1742, the poet went to him from Paris, where he had been observing the reception given to his tragedy of "Mahomet," which was, on the part of the audience, enthusiastic; but the ever-venomous Abbé Desfontaines and his crew denounced the play as impious, and raised such a storm that Cardinal Fleury, although he had read and approved of the piece, was obliged to advise the author to withdraw it. Just then came Frederick's invitation, which he showed to the Cardinal, expressing at the same time a wish to be of use to France at the Prussian Court. In these years the many-sided poet, seeing how few and hardly-won were the rewards of letters, how strong the vantage-ground that high office would give him against his enemies, was much disposed to try his fortune in diplomacy, especially with such an opening to that career as was offered by his intimacy with the most politic and most warlike sovereign then existing. With such views

he spent a week with Frederick at Aix-la-Chapelle, the king coming frequently to converse with his gifted visitor in his own room, and imparting freely his political views and intentions, which were duly communicated to the Cardinal; and, moreover, bribing Voltaire to come and live at Berlin by the promise of a beautiful house and estate there. A year later, many changes having happened in the interval, he again visited his august friend, this time at Berlin. Fleury was now dead. Voltaire had brought out in Paris his tragedy of "Merope," watching it from the box of his old friend the Maréchale de Villars, whose daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Villars, sat with them. The enthusiasm for the author was unbounded—nothing like it had ever been witnessed in a French theatre: not content with summoning him to the front of the box, the audience insisted that the Duchess should kiss him, which favour she, urged by her mother-in-law, bestowed with charming grace. But there were literary griefs to balance this success: his "Death of Cæsar" was not allowed to appear; he was excluded from a vacant seat which he had hoped for (the vacancy made by Cardinal Fleury) in the French Academy; and, chilled and disappointed, he again turned his thoughts to diplomacy. France was in difficulties; personal friends of Voltaire were among the ministers; and this time he went as an unrecognised envoy, with secret instructions. No welcome could be warmer than that which Frederick gave him; he was lodged close to the king's apartments, and their intimacy was as cordial as ever. Nor was there, this time, the disturbing element of a mission concealed from Frederick: the king, willing to accept him as a negotiator, received diplomatic sug-

gestions in a humorous, semi-serious, altogether indulgent vein, and even took pains to write such replies to him as from their tone, flattering to Voltaire, conciliatory to France, might serve the diplomatist without in the least committing the royal writer to any policy. But the mission was quite unsuccessful, because Frederick was convinced that he had nothing either to hope or to fear from France; because, too, he despised its government and its policy, and the diplomatist did not exist, whether Voltaire or any one else, who could have made him change his opinion; while any prospect of benefit which the aspiring negotiator might have derived from the king's compliments, vanished upon the sudden dismissal from office, through disfavour with the French sultana of the period, Madame de Chateauroux, of the favourably disposed functionary to whom his despatches were addressed.

CHAPTER XVI.

HE TRIES COURTIERSHIP.

VOLTAIRE'S attempt to gain a secure position by diplomacy had therefore failed. But he had yet another resource. His confidence, his manners, his powers of pleasing, and his ambition — all rendered courtiership a most promising career for him. He had already become a candidate for Court favour, not without some success, in the time of the Regent. Now his pretensions were far higher—the most celebrated man of letters existing could confer on the Court more lustre than he could possibly derive from it. And it would certainly appear that a Court with no great merits of its own to rest upon, could scarcely strengthen itself upon cheaper terms than by attaching to its interests the chief literary power of the nation. Fortifying himself with such sound reasoning, Voltaire opened his campaign for the conquest of the Court with an ode. Louis XV. was, in 1744, in the camp of the army which was besieging Fribourg. Thither Voltaire repaired, bearing with him his "Ode to the King." It begins, "Thou whose justice all Europe loves or fears; . . . king necessary to the world" — and so on. But notwithstanding this un-

scrupulous plastering of undeserving royalty, the effusion earned him no favour from its subject. In 1745 he tried again—and this time he had female influence to help him, more powerful than that of all the nine muses. The famous Madame de Pompadour was now the sultana regnant. Voltaire and she had been friends of old, when she was obscure Madame D'Etioles—and an opportunity occurred of turning her friendship to account. The Dauphin's wedding with a Spanish Princess was about to be celebrated; to the shows and spectacles Voltaire was called on to contribute a dramatic piece. Its title was "The Princess of Navarre:" he had, or professed to have, the meanest opinion of it; but, transfigured by the light of Madame de Pompadour's favour, it appeared so excellent that it gained for its author some lucrative offices at Court: he was appointed gentleman-in-ordinary of the chamber (whatever that may be), with permission to sell the dignity; and also Historiographer-Royal. Though gratified by these favours, he could not help seeing how inadequate was the occasion taken for bestowing them, and expressed his sense of the incongruity in a verse (not specially adapted for translation into English verse, nor a particularly good example of his style,) which says "My 'Henriade,' my 'Zaire,' and 'Alzire' never procured for me a single look from the king: I had a thousand enemies and very little glory —now, honours and benefits are showered on me for *une farce de la Foire*," which may fairly be translated "a burlesque at the Strand." But his Court-favour was entirely of the reflected kind: there was nothing personal in it, and of this he was made sensible before long. He celebrated the triumphal return of the

king, after the Fontenoy campaign, by a piece called the "Temple of Glory," in which flattery as usual was not spared, and in which the king figured as "Trajan." After the performance, Voltaire was near Louis as he passed out attended by the poet's old friend, the Duke of Richelieu; and emboldened by the reception of his piece, he approached the Duke and said, loud enough for the king to hear, "Is Trajan satisfied?" The dull monarch replied only by a frigid, contemptuous glance. It has been asserted that Voltaire repelled Louis Quinze by the vivacity and familiarity of his eulogies — that the king would not admit the idea of counting men of letters and men of intellect for anything, or of tolerating them on any footing at Court: "It is not the fashion in France," said he.

Nevertheless, Voltaire's interest with the ruler's ruler procured for him, in 1746, the long-coveted distinction of a place in the French Academy. He imagined that henceforth he would find, in his associates, thirty-nine champions against his enemies, persecutors, and slanderers; but in this he was mistaken. Even his friend Madame de Pompadour began to fail him. Under some hostile influence she bestowed on the tragic poet Crebillon favours hitherto denied to Voltaire: his play of "Catiline" was brought out with extraordinary advantages, and his works were printed at the Louvre, though that distinction was even now refused to the "Henriade." It was natural that Voltaire should feel sore at this: he withdrew from Court to his retreat at Cirey; and there, among a multitude of works, he employed himself in making such reprisals upon Crebillon as would never have originated in any but a mind of astonishing activity

and energy. He had always rendered honour to his brother dramatist, whose repute, indeed, rested upon very just foundations: nor did he now condescend to any sort of detraction; but taking the subjects of three of Crebillon's tragedies, he treated them himself. "Semiramis" retained its name; "Electre" became "Oreste;" "Catiline" was "Rome Sauvée:" and into these plays, especially the last, Voltaire infused a force and brilliancy which left no doubt of his superiority, on the ground they occupied in common, to his favoured rival.

CHAPTER XVII.

LA PUCELLE.

In the quiet of Cirey, Voltaire must have felt like some storm-tost mariner who has at length reached a land-locked bay. Yet even here he was not always free from the apprehensions which had beset his earlier career. The guest already quoted, Madame de Grafigny, once had a curious illustration of this. She had been present at the readings of the several cantos of the "Maid" as they were completed. These readings were conducted with some secrecy, and took place in the bath-room, as a very private spot, accessible only to a chosen few; and Madame de Grafigny, much delighted with the poem, from time to time gave a brief account of its tenor and progress to a correspondent, M. Devaux. Among other seignorial rights exercised by Madame du Châtelet at Cirey was the control of the post-bag; and on what she might think sufficient occasion she did not scruple to open letters addressed to others. Suspecting that people in the neighbouring towns had talked about the readings, she opened a letter from M. Devaux to Madame de Grafigny, and read these words: "The canto of 'Jeanne' is charming!" This information, conveyed

to Voltaire, filled the excitable mind of the poet with apprehensions—he fancied that a copy of the poem had been sent to Devaux, that other copies were probably abroad, that he was compromised, that he would have to fly. Accordingly, when Madame de Grafigny had retired to rest, she was surprised by the abrupt apparition of her host, who cried out that he was lost, that his life was in her hands. "Quick, Madame, write and get it back!" he entreated hurriedly. The poor woman did not understand him. "Fie, fie!" he exclaimed; "there ought to be good faith where the life of a poor unfortunate like me is concerned." His appeals, in spite of her attempts to explain, grew more urgent, till at last Madame du Châtelet entered in a fury holding out the opened letter, which she called a proof of infamy. The unlucky Madame de Grafigny was quite overcome by these attacks; and Voltaire, perceiving this, and seized with compassion for their helpless guest, restrained and endeavoured to soothe the Marquise. As soon as she could find voice and obtain a hearing, Madame de Grafigny explained the words which had been so misinterpreted. "I must say, in his praise," she states, "that from the first moment Voltaire believed me, and immediately begged me to pardon him." Next day she was ill, and in despair; she had no money wherewith to leave the place: "at last the good Voltaire came at noon; he was vexed to tears by my condition; he repeatedly asked forgiveness, and I had occasion to see the sensibility of his soul." After this he did all he could to make her forget the scene, of which he was much ashamed.

"The Maid," or "*ma Jeanne*," as Voltaire generally termed it, was, he says, his diversion between the acts of

more serious occupations. It is a burlesque poem in twenty-two cantos, in which the female champion of France figures in a variety of adventures, which are by no means calculated to exalt her claims to sanctity: Charles VII., Agnes Sorel, the famous knights Dunois and John Chandos, and other renowned personages, also appear in Hudibrastic guise. According to Longchamp, who was Voltaire's valet and copyist throughout his abode at Cirey, and who has left many particulars of his life there, it was at a supper at the Duke of Richelieu's that the idea of the poem was started. The subject of the Maid of Orleans had been treated as a serious epic by a French Academician, Chapelain, who, whatever his abilities in other walks of literature, had only succeeded in rendering his heroine so ridiculous by his stilted and wearisome eulogies and bad verses, as almost to forbid any one else to adventure in the same direction. "I will wager," said the Duke to Voltaire, "that you would have made much better use of the subject, and would have managed to exalt your heroine without making a saint of her." Voltaire, in reply, said that he did not think Boileau himself could have made much of such an unpromising theme, and that he believed that it lent itself much better to burlesque than heroic treatment. The Duke, agreeing in this, urged him to undertake the task; the guests joined in the request, becoming so importunate, that he at last agreed to examine the subject as soon as he could find leisure; and he kept his promise so well, that in a few weeks he had four cantos ready. These, being read to the same party at the Duke's, were so applauded that he resolved to extend and complete the work. In the course of it he introduced so many satiri-

cal episodes, and made it the vehicle of so much pleasantry on contemporary events and personages, that he dismissed all idea of publishing it during his lifetime, because of the hostility it would be certain to arouse; and hence the scene with Madame de Grafigny. But as usual, furtive and falsified editions began to appear, till, many years later, he published one himself at Geneva. The work is so little suited to the taste of our time that no specimens can be given; yet it was very generally esteemed as one of his most brilliant performances. "The eighteenth century," says St Beuve, "adored the libertine 'Maid,' and the most correct people could repeat entire cantos. M. de Malesherbes knew his 'Maid' by heart." In cleverness, in its audacious spirit, and in the opposing tides of admiration and reprobation which it set in motion, it is more comparable to "Don Juan" than to any other work.

Much as they appreciated their rural home, Madame du Châtelet and Voltaire did not object to leave it occasionally for a visit to Paris, where the lady plunged into amusements and dissipations with as much ardour as if Newton and geometry were idle words. In the year 1746 they were at Fontainebleau, guests of the Duke of Richelieu, and playing high at the queen's table. A run of luck, or perhaps worse, set in against Madame du Châtelet, who, on the second night, was a loser of between three and four thousand pounds. Voltaire, disturbed at so considerable a loss, whispered to her in English that her absorption in the game prevented her from seeing that she was playing with sharpers. The words were overheard and repeated; and perceiving this, and knowing how serious might be the consequences,

they slipt quietly away, and at once, in the middle of the night, set out for. Paris. On the road a wheel broke—a common occurrence of the time, and one in which the wheels probably were less in fault than the roads. Voltaire sent a peasant to Sceaux with a letter, begging an asylum from his old friend the Duchesse du Maine, now stricken in years. He was welcomed at once, was admitted with all due secrecy by a discreet steward, placed in a very private set of apartments, and waited on by a trusty valet, none else of the household knowing of his presence. At night, after the Duchess had gone to bed, and all the servants had withdrawn, Voltaire used to descend by a secret stair to her chamber (bed-chambers were places of comparatively public resort in those days); the confidential valet laid out his supper-table at the bedside; and the Duchess, who greatly delighted in his conversation, talked over old times with him. After supper he sometimes read to her a tale, composed during the day expressly for her amusement. The "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," introduced into France by Galland many years before, had rendered oriental romance popular. Voltaire had seen how English writers had made it the convenient vehicle of a moral lesson, as in Addison's "Vision of Mirza;" he now extended its use, in those light and sparkling romances, which are the most enduringly popular of his works. "Babouc," "Memnon," "Scarmentado," "Micromegas," and best of all, "Zadig," first saw the light at the delighted old princess's bedside.

While he was thus occupied, the Marquise was endeavouring to pay her play debt, and to soothe the resentment of the illustrious players, by some of whom diligent inquiry had been made for Voltaire, who was believed to

have taken refuge in Berlin. At length, Madame du Châtelet came to Sceaux, to announce that all fear of ill consequences from his imprudent speech was over. The Duchess kept them both at Sceaux, to join a brilliant company assembled there. It was the custom to hold readings in the drawing-room before dinner. The Duchess wished the company to share the pleasure which she had felt in hearing the little romances. Voltaire, one of the finest of readers, complied; they were found altogether delightful, and he was made to promise that they should be printed; and, accordingly, "Zadig" appeared soon afterwards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ZADIG.

NOTHING was ever recounted more lightly and gracefully than the narrative by which Zadig is conducted through his adventures. These are altogether of the oriental type, such as the "Arabian Nights" has made familiar to us—prodigious occurrences, discoveries, and meetings that take place just at the right time; surprising ups and downs of fortune, penury and prodigality treading on one another's heels; the extreme of luxury prevailing at one moment, the most abject misery in the next. But while the gorgeous fancies of the East trust, and with reason, to their surprising incidents and splendid colouring alone for their effect, Voltaire has made his tale the setting of innumerable gems of satire, wisdom, and wit. The failings of humanity, the defects of society and of governments, the errors of theology, and the hypocrisy of priesthoods, are all in turn the subjects of what may be called raillery rather than sarcasm, which is a term too harsh for the pleasantries of the book. Also, like so many novels that hold a high and permanent place, it contains much of the personal experience of the author. Zadig is Voltaire, with increased

personal advantages, and more simplicity, reticence, and modesty.

"It is astonishing that, having so much wit, he never insulted with his ridicule the chatterings, so vague, desultory, and confused, the reckless disparagements, the ignorant decisions, the gross jests, the vain noise of words, which is called conversation in Babylon. He had learnt in the first book of Zoroaster that self-love is a balloon filled with wind, whence issue tempests when it is pricked. Zadig, above all, did not make a boast of despising and conquering women. He was generous; he was not afraid of bestowing favours on the ungrateful, observing the great precept of Zoroaster: 'When you are eating, give something to the dogs lest they bite you.' He was also as wise as it is possible to be, for it was his aim to live with wise men. Learned in the sciences of the ancient Chaldeans, he was not ignorant of the facts of nature as ascertained in his own time, and knew of metaphysics as much as in all ages has been known—that is to say, very little. He was firmly persuaded that there were three hundred and sixty-five days and a quarter in the year, in spite of the new philosophy of the day, and that the sun was in the centre of the world; and when the chief Magians told him, with insulting superciliousness, that his sentiments were pernicious, and that to believe that the sun turned on itself, and that there were twelve months in the year, was to be the enemy of the State, he held his tongue, without anger, and without disdain."

In Zadig's early projects of matrimony he discovers, and submits with philosophic good-humour to, the inconstancy of women. He has a friend called Cador, and a wife called Azora; and the reader of their domestic history can hardly fail to be reminded of Genonville and Suzanne de Livry. There is also an envious man (an Abbé Desfontaines), who is always doing Zadig ill offices, which he requites with benefits. A certain bishop, Boyer,

had been one of Voltaire's chief persecutors, and mainly instrumental in excluding him from the Academy—in the tale he figures as "an archimage, Yébor" (anagram of Boyer), "the most foolish, and therefore the most fanatical, of all the Chaldeans. This man would have had Zadig impaled for the greater glory of the sun, and would then have recited the breviary of Zoroaster in a more satisfied tone."

All the early misfortunes of Zadig, like those of Voltaire, are persecutions caused by his efforts to set people right. When these have quite crushed him, a happy discovery not only rescues him from capital punishment, by hanging, but renders him the favourite of the King of Babylon, in whose good graces he makes such progress as presently to become grand vizier; and under his sage and benevolent administration the empire attains to the height of prosperity and content. "The king said, 'The great minister!' the queen said, 'The charming minister!' and both added, 'What a pity if he had been hanged.'" His adverse destiny, however, intervenes—the king is jealous of the queen's regard for him—and after many escapes he becomes the slave of an Arabian merchant, Sétoc, who presently discovers his merit and makes him his intimate friend. Zadig "was vexed to discover that Sétoc adored the celestial army—that is to say, the sun, moon, and stars—according to the ancient usage of Arabia." He argued with him, but in vain:—

"When evening came, Zadig lighted a great number of flambeaus in the tent where they were about to sup; and when his patron appeared, he cast himself on his knees before the waxlights, and thus addressed them: 'Eternal and brilliant luminaries, be ye always propitious to me!' Having offered

this prayer, he seated himself at table without looking at Sétoc. 'What is the meaning of this?' said Sétoc, astonished. 'I do as you do,' answered Zadig. 'I adore these candles, while I neglect their master and mine.' Sétoc comprehended the profound sense of this apologue. The wisdom of his slave entered into his soul; he no more lavished incense on creations, but worshipped the Being who had made them."

Before he left Arabia with his master, he had, among other good acts, put a virtual end to the practice of permitting wives to burn themselves with their deceased husbands; and for this, he found on his return, he was to suffer:—

"During his journey to Bassora, the priests of the stars had resolved to punish him. The jewellery and ornaments of the young widows whom they sent to the pile had been the perquisite of the priests; and this was why they wished to burn Zadig for the ill turn he had played them. They therefore accused him of entertaining erroneous views about the celestial army; they deposed against him, and made oath that they had heard him affirm that the stars did not set in the sea. This frightful blasphemy caused the judges to tremble; they were ready to rend their garments when they heard these impious words—and would have done so, without doubt, if Zadig had had the means of paying for them. As it was, in the excess of their grief, they condemned him to be burnt at a slow fire."

From this fate, however, he was rescued, and despatched on business by his master to the Isle of Serendib, where he presently has relations as agreeable with Nabussan, its discerning monarch, as Voltaire's with Frederick, though the Oriental bears no resemblance to the Prussian ruler. Zadig's observations on the government of the island furnish the author with the oppor-

tunity of a little satire on the farmers-general of the French revenue :—

"This good prince was always flattered, deceived, and robbed; it was who should most pillage his treasury. The receiver-general of Serendib always set the example, faithfully followed by the rest. This the king knew; he had often changed his treasurers, but he had never been able to change the established mode of dividing the king's revenues into two unequal parts, of which the smallest always came to his majesty, and the largest to the administrators.

"Nabussan confided his trouble to Zadig: 'You who know so many fine things,' said he, 'can you not tell me how to find a treasurer who will not rob me?' 'Assuredly,' said Zadig, 'I know an infallible mode of giving you a man who will keep his hands clean.' The king was charmed, and asked, while he embraced him, how this was to be done. 'You have only,' said Zadig, 'to cause all those who present themselves for the dignity of treasurer to dance; he who dances the lightest will be infallibly the most honest man.' 'You jest,' said the king; 'a pleasant way certainly of choosing a receiver of my revenues! What! do you pretend that he who cuts the neatest caper will be the most upright and skilful financier?' 'I will not answer for his being the most skilful,' returned Zadig, 'but I assure you that he will, without doubt, be the most honest.' Zadig spoke with so much confidence that the king believed he had some supernatural secret by which to recognise financiers. 'I do not like the supernatural,' said Zadig; 'people and books who deal in prodigies have always displeased me. If your majesty will allow me to put what I propose to the proof, you will be convinced it is the easiest and simplest thing possible.' Nabussan was much more astonished to hear that the secret was simple, than if it had been given to him as a miracle. 'Well,' said he, 'do as you think proper.' 'Leave me alone for that,' said Zadig; 'you will gain more in this proof than you think for.' The same day he made public, in the king's name, that all candidates for the post of receiver-in-chief of the

moneys of his gracious majesty Nabussan, son of Nussanab, must present themselves in habits of light silk, on the first day of the month of the crocodile, in the king's ante-chamber. They came, accordingly, to the number of sixty-four. Musicians had been placed in a neighbouring saloon. All was prepared for the ball: but the door of this saloon was closed; and it was necessary, in order to enter it, to pass through a small gallery, which was somewhat dark. An usher went to meet and introduce each candidate in succession by this passage, in which each was left alone for some minutes. The king, aware of the plan, had spread out all his treasures in this gallery. When all were assembled in the saloon, the king ordered the dance to begin. Never had any dancers performed more heavily or with less grace; all held their heads down, their backs bent, their hands glued to their sides. 'What rascals!' murmured Zadig. One alone made his steps with agility, his head up, his look assured, his body straight, his arms extended, his thighs firm. 'Ah, the honest man, the excellent man!' cried Zadig. The king embraced this upright dancer, declaring him treasurer; and all the others were punished and taxed, with the utmost justice—for every one, in the time spent in the gallery, had filled his pockets, till he could hardly walk. The king was distressed for human nature that among these sixty-four dancers there should be sixty-three thieves. The dark gallery was named the Corridor of Temptation. In Persia these sixty-three lords would have been impaled; in other countries a chamber of justice would have consumed in costs three times the money stolen, replacing nothing in the king's coffers; in yet another kingdom they would have been honourably acquitted, and the light dancer disgraced; in Serendib they were only sentenced to add to the public treasure, for Nabussan was very indulgent."

Many and entertaining are the adventures by which the at length happy Zadig is elevated to the side of his beloved Astarte on the throne of Babylon; upon which

event the envious man, the Babylonian Desfontaines, died of spite and shame; Cador, cherished according to his services, continued to be the friend of the king, "who was then the only monarch on earth who had a friend." Many just and beneficent actions were performed; and among others, a Babylonian noble who had deprived a fisherman of his savings and his wife (as previously made known to Zadig in one of his adventures), was compelled to give them back; "but the fisherman, grown wise, only took the money."

Some of our readers have probably, in their youth, met with Parnell's "Hermit;" and, as probably, that versified attempt to justify the ways of Providence will have appeared more than commonly unpleasant, even revolting. Although the fable, derived from the East, had been at least twice used before Parnell adopted it, yet, strange to say, the fertile and original Voltaire did not disdain to incorporate it, without acknowledgment and without advantage to the story, in his gem of a tale.

CHAPTER XIX.

END OF THE CIREY EPOCH.

It is known from the Marquise du Châtelet's correspondence that she considered the first ten years of this life at Cirey paradise. For so long Voltaire continued to be the devoted lover, full of consideration and of attention, ready with graceful gifts and still more graceful verses. He wrote poetical epistles in which she figured as the illustration or pointed the moral; he wrote pieces complimenting her on her learning, and not destitute of allusions to her wit and beauty; he replied in highly-finished rhymes, in her name, to illustrious correspondents. But the inevitable time came when all this changed: the poet was growing old; notwithstanding the astonishing vitality which preserved his mental energy in perfection to eighty-four, he aged physically, perhaps, before his time. He was thinner than ever; he lost his teeth, henceforward assuming that profile to which his busts, made in extreme old age, accustom us; he was often an invalid; and he began to regard the fair sex as to be turned to account chiefly for literary purposes. Thus it was not so much that he gave up love as that love gave him up. Nevertheless they parted friends, and Voltaire

made his adieux to the retiring deity with admirable grace. It must have been at this period, and in reply to some domestic remonstrances, that he wrote as follows:—

"Dost ask me still of love to dream?
Then bring me back love's radiant time!
Give to my sunset's parting gleam
The glow and freshness of my prime.

From haunts wherein the god of Wine
And god of Love hold joyous sway,
Time, in his cold hand taking mine,
Turns my reluctant steps away.

Yet from his ordinance severe,
Some benefit at least may spring—
Who still apes youth when age is here,
Knows all the sorrows age can bring.

So let the young alone pursue
The dalliance sweet that makes their heaven;
And since our moments are so few,
Let some to wisdom's quest be given.

Yet oh! are ye for ever fled,
Illusion, fondness, fantasy?
Celestial gifts that o'er me spread,
A charm to cause all cares to flee?

Two deaths we die, 'tis plain decreed;
To cease to love, nor know the bliss
Of being loved, is death indeed—
To cease to live is nought to this.

Thus did I wistfully deplore
The errant joys of life's young day;
My heart, reviving, longed once more
For those false fires that led astray.

Then, stooping through celestial space,
Fair Friendship to my succour came;
She had, methought, Love's tender grace,
Though nought of Love's impetuous flame.

Her charm so strange and sweet prevailed,
And, guided by the light she bore,
I followed her—yet still bewailed
That none but her might lure me more.

Madame du Châtelet was unfortunately indisposed to accept either poetry, or friendship, or even geometry, as a complete substitute for a lover's devotion, and did not reject the opportunity, when it was offered, of obtaining that sympathy which was no longer bestowed by the philosophic poet. At Luneville, sometimes at Commercy, a few miles over the frontier, Stanislaus, the father of Louis XV.'s queen, once king of Poland in reality, and still keeping the title, held his Court as Duke of Lorraine—that being the dominion which the greater Powers had, in the course of their negotiations (high-principled and disinterested as those of great Powers usually are), assigned to him in compensation for the loss of his kingdom; and here Voltaire and his Emilie were warmly-welcomed guests. The monarch, in the absence of other domestic companionship, had concluded a left-handed alliance with the Marquise de Boufflers (the title of Marquise appears to have been almost as fatal to propriety as that of Abbé), who, in turn, had bestowed *her* left hand upon Monsieur de St Lambert, a young guardsman about the Court of Lorraine. Stanislaus objected to the attentions of the good-looking guardsman, who, accordingly, could only join Madame de Boufflers' card and supper parties after the dethroned potentate had gone to

bed. This left a good deal of St Lambert's evening unoccupied, and it was in these trying circumstances that he sought to console himself with the society of Madame du Châtelet until it was time to go to supper with Madame de Boufflers. In these preliminary visits he made himself so agreeable that Voltaire's portrait in the ring shortly went after the Duke of Richelieu's, and was replaced by St Lambert's. Nor was Voltaire long left in doubt as to the new state of affairs, which at first made him very angry, but to which he soon reconciled himself so completely as to make the situation the subject of a little comedy in verse: this work, however, never was published.

This was in 1748; in the following year Madame du Châtelet died, after a very short illness. Of the three widowers whom she left, Voltaire was by far the most inconsolable. The Marquis's loss was not of a kind to be considered irreparable; St Lambert had Madame de Boufflers and other sources of consolation; but Voltaire fell into a transport of grief, and for long continued to appear stunned by the blow, remaining alone in his chamber plunged in the idlest torpor. This event ended his abode at Cirey; the chateau was handed over to the Marquis, and Voltaire took up his residence for a time in Paris, removing thither his furniture, pictures, busts, museums, and the material of his literary works. But it was still a long while before he recovered any degree of calm; nor does it appear that Madame du Châtelet had any successor in his regard, and she may therefore with propriety be styled the Last of Voltaire's Marquises.

HIS OLD AGE.

CHAPTER XX.

LAST VISIT TO FREDERICK.

Bereft of the companion by whose side he had traversed the plateaus of middle age, Voltaire now found himself facing alone those downward slopes of life which always grow more rapid of descent till they disappear over the verge of the world. Far from finding any flattering illusions in the prospect before him, he was prone to exaggerate his feebleness and to anticipate the approaches of age. But though he felt the loss of the Marquise so severely, he was too elastic of nature, had too many sources of interest, and possibly too little depth of heart, to be permanently unsettled by the blow. "I know no more powerful remedy," he has said, "against the ills of the soul, than the strong and serious application of the intellect to other objects." Accordingly, being persuaded by his old friends Richelieu and D'Argental, who, after his arrival in Paris, paid him daily visits in his sorrow, to seek this mode of distraction, he busied himself with completing his two tragedies, "Orestes"

and "Rome Saved," for the stage, and with superintending the rehearsals at a small private theatre, taking parts himself, after a while, as had always been his custom. It was at this time (February 1750) that he began his acquaintance with the celebrated actor, Le Kain. Voltaire saw him taking a part in a new comedy, and desired that the actor should visit him next day. Le Kain describes the poet's eyes as "sparkling with fire, imagination, and genius. In addressing him I was penetrated with respect, enthusiasm, admiration, and fear. I was experiencing all these sensations at once, when M. de Voltaire had the goodness to put an end to my embarrassment by opening his arms and 'thanking God for having created a being who had so moved and melted him by reciting such very bad verses.'" Voltaire, after advising him against the stage as a profession, offered him 10,000 francs (£400) with which to start in trade as a jeweller, his father's business. Before discussing the question, Le Kain begged to be allowed to declaim to him from Piron's play of "Gustave." "'Give me nothing of Piron's,' cried he, in a thundering and terrible voice; 'I am not fond of bad verses: repeat something from Racine,'" which he did, drawing from Voltaire enthusiastic expressions of delight. For six months the poet supported the actor and gave him his first notions of his art; and, as Le Kain records many years later, "now he calls me his great actor, his Garrick, his favourite son—these are titles which I owe only to his goodness; but that which I adopt in the bottom of my heart is, 'a pupil penetrated with respect and gratitude.'" He goes on to sketch his great friend's character:—

"M. de Voltaire has always been constant to his friends. His character is impetuous, his heart good and compassionate. He is modest in the highest degree on the subject of the praises which have been lavished on him by kings, people of letters, and the whole nation. Profound and just in his judgments on the works of others, full of amenity, of politeness, and of grace in his intercourse with the world—inflexible towards those who have offended him,—there you have his character drawn from nature."

But whatever his achievements or his fame, he never attained to so much favour at Versailles as would have secured him from persecution. He found it impossible to propitiate the laced suit and perruque which called themselves Louis XV., and which resemble nothing so much as Feathertop, who was put together, clothed, and inspired with a kind of vitality, by the old witch in Hawthorne's tale; or what may have been the original of Feathertop, in the "Dunciad:"—

> "A brain of feathers, and a heart of lead;
> And empty words he gave, and sounding strain,
> But senseless, lifeless! idol void and vain!"

Voltaire's post of Historiographer-Royal gave him admission to Court, but he could not join the privileged few who passed beyond the antechamber, and perhaps never, in all his famed existence, could boast of being present when his sovereign changed his shirt. In despotic monarchies, access to the king's person, even if it be only to powder his wig, is a matter of high importance; for the dexterous use of a moment of good-humour or caprice in the source of all honour and prosperity, a pretty speech, or an apt flattery, or that mysterious and debasing quality, a talent for intrigue, may be the making of a courtier.

What now lent a double sharpness to disappointment was Voltaire's consciousness that he had stooped to flatter this semblance of a king. Even his friend Madame de Pompadour was estranged by the enmity of the men of letters who could gain her ear; and his old schoolfellow D'Argenson,[1] now Minister, had refused, what Voltaire thought he ought to have offered, admission to the Academies of Science and Belles Lettres.

While he experienced these mortifications in his own country, his friend the King of Prussia had persistently pressed on him the most flattering tokens of appreciation, in the offers by which he tried to persuade the poet to take up his abode at the Court of Berlin. These Voltaire had hitherto steadfastly declined, pleading his obligations to Madame du Châtelet. That tie was now dissolved, and Frederick not only repeated his invitation, but reinforced it with the promise of a pension of £850 a-year, the gold key of chamberlain, an Order of Merit, and apartments in the palace close to his Majesty's own. Voltaire no longer hesitated, but went to demand the king's permission to quit France. Louis is said to have graciously responded that he was welcome to go when he pleased, and turned the royal back upon him. Madame de Pompadour took a cold leave of him, and desired him to present her compliments to the King of Prussia. The message being duly delivered, Frederick replied, "I don't know her," and passed to something else—which did not, however, prevent the discreet poet from writing some of his little classical verses to the Marquise, in which he

[1] There were two D'Argensons, schoolfellows of Voltaire—the elder, the Marquis, was always friendly to him; the younger was the Minister.

"had the honour, on the part of Achilles, to return thanks to Venus."

He is considered to be unrivalled in these gay little pieces of verse, of many of which Madame de Pompadour is the subject, containing compliments by implication, and depending for success on grace and felicity of expression. To say the truth, he occasionally seems to the present writer to be not at his happiest in giving point to these; while compliance with the taste of his times, which was in favour of extensive dealings with the heathen mythology, renders his allusions, relating as they frequently do to goddesses, Fates, Loves, &c., a little trite at the present day. The following "Madrigals" to the three sisters of Frederick the Great are, in the original, excellent specimens of the grace and adroitness which were often needed to excuse his audacity:—

"To the Princess Ulrique.

"Often, amid delusions vain,
A little spark of truth will gleam;
Last night, exalted in a dream,
I did to royal rank attain,
And loved you, Princess—more, my love I spoke:
The gods took not all from me when I woke,
Only my crown did not remain."

"To the Princesses Ulrique and Amélie.

"If Paris were recalled to life
To say which owns the brightest eyes,
He would in half divide the prize,
And so preserve the world from strife."

"To the Princesses Ulrique, Amélie, and Wilhelmine."

"Fair Ulrique! charming Amélie! forgive!
I thought to love you only, and to live
From other sovereignty free:
Now, with adoring eyes, I see
That sister on whose steps must Love attend.
Sure it can ne'er the Graces Three offend
To love all three!"

He arrived at Berlin in July 1750. There now commenced the singular relations between the two most notable men of their time, which seemed to be, at first, so full of pleasure and advantage for both. Voltaire's reception was such as might well pour balm over the wounded feelings of a sensitive poet. He was invested with his cross and key, and lived in the most complete and friendly intimacy with the king. Frederick had always been ambitious of the fame of an author, and had several works, poetical and other, at this time in the press. To the correction of these Voltaire gave an occasional hour; the rest of his time was passed either in privacy and occupied with his own pursuits, or in playing his part in such companies, entertainments, and conversations as were entirely to his mind. No wonder he should say, "I find a port after thirty years of storms." On the other hand, the French Court began to talk with resentment of his having left it. His friend the Duke of Richelieu wrote to say so, adding remonstrances of his own:—

"You have done me the honour," replies Voltaire, "to inform me that the king and Madame de Pompadour, who never bestowed a glance on me when I was in France, have

been shocked that I should quit the country. But how should I be treated if I were to return? Madame de Pompadour seemed, at the last, entirely estranged from me. Shall I renounce the favour and familiarity of one of the greatest kings on earth, of a man who will go down to posterity, to go and intrigue at a toilet for a word which I shall not obtain? to solicit Monsieur d'Argenson in my old age for permission to pass an occasional hour at the assemblies of the Academies of Science and of Inscriptions?"

And though Voltaire was still willing, even desirous, to return on fitting conditions, and begged Richelieu to use his good offices to that end, yet he evidently regarded complete expatriation as the alternative. So this remarkable alliance went on, of a king who, though not yet at the height of his fame as a general, had made himself a name among the great masters of war, and who governed his kingdom without ministers, and the illustrious foreigner whose conquests in other fields were still more eminent and assured. In this period Voltaire finished his 'Age of Louis XIV.,' corrected his "Maid," added to his "Essay on the Morals of Nations," and wrote the poem (similar in form and spirit to his "Discourse on Man") on the "Law of Nature." His plays were acted at Court, the highest personages taking parts along with the author; he was treated with the most friendly consideration by the princesses; and he might sup every night with the king, who really laid aside his royalty at these moments, liked to surround himself with men of intellect, and encouraged the freest conversation. "When the king," says Voltaire, "has governed all the morning, and governed single-handed, he is a philosopher for the rest of the day, and his suppers really are what the suppers of Paris are believed to be—they are always

delicious, but reason always rules there: one thinks boldly there—one is free."

"I had set out," he says elsewhere, "to pay my court to the King of Prussia, thinking to see Italy afterwards, and then to return to have my 'Age of Louis XIV.' printed in Holland. I arrive at Potsdam; the great blue eyes of the king, and his sweet smile and his siren voice, his five victories, his extreme taste for retirement and for letters—in fine, kindness enough to turn one's head, delightful conversation, perfect liberty, forgetfulness of royalty in our intercourse—all this carried me away."

It is even recorded that, in the carnival-time, Voltaire held a *levée*, as an established royal favourite, when all the great officials paid their respects to him. But it unluckily happened that at this time Voltaire's propensities for financial speculation got the better of his judgment. The exchequer bills of Saxony, at a considerable discount at home, were, by special proviso, payable to Prussian subjects in gold. The opportunity which a Prussian subject would therefore enjoy of buying the bills at a discount, and then obtaining full value, had occurred to others, but had been rendered of small avail by stringent regulations and penalties. Nevertheless it was upon such a doubtful enterprise that Voltaire now entered, with the respectable assistance of a Jew money-lender and general dealer, with whom he had had some transactions, such as hiring jewels in which to play his part of Cicero. This associate was despatched to Dresden, really to buy the paper, but ostensibly to speculate in furs and jewellery, and was furnished by Voltaire with drafts on Paris, to a considerable amount, leaving as security, with his employer, jewels valued at his own estimate. It occurred to

the wily Hebrew, incapable even of that limited degree of honour which the proverb enjoins, that he might employ Voltaire's money in another way to much better advantage, and that the nature of their relations would secure him from the consequences. Acting upon this inspiration, he proceeded to apply the proceeds of Voltaire's bills to purposes of private trade. The wrath of the defrauded and excitable philosopher may be imagined. It took, at first, the form of nearly throttling the Jew, and then of bringing an action against him, in which, seeking to meet an unscrupulous enemy with his own weapons, Voltaire descended to steps not consistent with the dignity of a great light of letters and a royal chamberlain; and though he, after a fashion, gained his cause, yet scandal speedily made both Berlin and Paris resound with the liveliest variations on this providential theme.

Of all this Frederick was kept duly apprised, and did not fail to rate his chamberlain pretty severely on the occasion. But his own standard of honour had not hitherto appeared to be of a character so lofty as to render Voltaire's offence unpardonable, and the charm of the culprit's conversation soon restored him to favour. Among Frederick's papers was found a description of Voltaire in the royal handwriting, and supposed at first to be also of the royal composition, though it was considered, later, as a transcript:—

"I esteem in you," it says, "the finest genius that the ages have produced. I admire your verse, I love your prose, above all the little detached pieces in your Literary Miscellanies. Never had any author before you a tact so fine, nor a taste so true and delicate, as yours. In conversation you are charming; you can at once instruct and amuse. You are the most

seductive creature that I know, capable of making everybody love you when you wish. You have so many graces of intellect that you can at the same time offend, and deserve the indulgence of everybody. In fact, you would be perfect if you were not man."

So the suppers went on as before, Voltaire was again in the ascendant, scandal was reduced to speak of him in whispers—only, along with his Court-favour, sprang up and flourished the envy which it excited among his fellow-courtiers, especially his countrymen.

A Doctor La Mettrie, one of these French adventurers, imparted to Voltaire, as a piece of news likely to gratify him, that Frederick had said, "I still want Voltaire for another year—one sucks the orange before throwing away the skin;" and about the same time, this or another kind friend told his Majesty that General Manstein having taken his Memoirs to Voltaire for revision, received for reply, "The king sends me his dirty linen to wash, so yours must wait;" and also, that the poet, seeing on his table a packet of the royal verses, brought for correction, had petulantly exclaimed, "This man is both Cæsar and the Abbé Cotin" (a poetaster satirised by Boileau).

Here were at any rate some promising elements of distrust and suspicion. Voltaire took La Mettrie's communication much to heart, and dwelt upon it in his correspondence. He made it, with his doubts and reflections thereupon, the subject of a long letter to his niece, and referred to it more than once afterwards. "I am always thinking of the *orange-skin*. I try not to believe it, but I fear I am like those betrayed husbands who force themselves to believe that their wives are very

faithful. The poor people perceive something at the bottom of their hearts which warns them of their disaster." In December, La Mettrie, who was a young and robust man, died suddenly from eating, at the close of a good dinner, a pie supposed to be of pheasant, but in reality composed, by way of a neat practical joke, of eagle with the wholesome addition of pork hashed with ginger. La Mettrie gallantly finished this too-seductive dish, and died the next day; and Voltaire, after recording the catastrophe (which does not seem to have caused him very lively regret), observes, "I should have liked to put to La Mettrie, in the article of death, fresh inquiries about the *orange-skin*. That fine soul, on the point of quitting the world, would not have dared to lie. There is great reason to suppose that he spoke the truth."

There were other things, hard to bear, about which he could have no consolatory doubts, that tended to lessen the charm of his intercourse with the king. It was well known that Frederick was fond of indulging one of the ugliest and most impolitic propensities which can afflict a monarch, or, indeed, anybody—namely, that of saying things with the intention to wound. This is a propensity which despotism especially tends to develop, as may be seen in many a petty household tyrant, endowed, for mysterious ends, with the terrible combination of a bad temper and a sharp tongue, whose defenceless wife (or husband), children, and dependants suffer hourly laceration from carefully-concocted sarcasms. The allusion to Frederick in a part of Voltaire's panegyric on Louis XIV. cannot be mistaken: "Louis was so far from saying disagreeable things, which are deadly arrows in the hands of a prince, that he did not even permit himself the most

innocent and agreeable railleries; while there are certain personages who every day indulge in such as are most cruel and lamentable." Voltaire long continued to retain the smart of these. Years after he had left Germany, he used to allude, in his letters, to Frederick as "Luc"—a name that for a long time puzzled commentators. One of his secretaries cleared up the mystery. It seems that when Voltaire was living near Geneva, he had a large monkey who used to attack and bite friends and enemies. This pet one day gave his master three wounds in the leg, which obliged him for some time to use crutches. He had named the creature Luc; and in conversation with intimate friends, or in letters to them, among others to M. d'Alembert, he also designated the King of Prussia by the name of Luc,—"because," said he, "Frederick is like my monkey, who bites those who caress him."

Into the atmosphere of Court-favour and agreeable supper-parties, already charged with this dangerous matter, an element which proved explosive was introduced in the course of 1752. The President of the Berlin Academy was a Frenchman, the well-known Maupertuis, who had not only felt, but made apparent, much jealousy of the superior Court-favour of the later-arrived Voltaire, and whose character—rather that of a wiseacre than of a sage—offered to his satirical foe but too-tempting opportunities for reprisal. Maupertuis had put forth some scientific theories claiming to be valuable and original, which one of his academicians proclaimed to be neither. The President and the Academy, indignant at such a revolt against authority, expelled the member. Voltaire, believing, as all the world came to believe, that the rebellious

academician was in the right, published, anonymously, a letter to prove that the treatment he had received was unjust. Frederick, both as king and disciplinarian, was disposed to stand by his President; and was so indignant at the side taken by Voltaire, whose style at once betrayed him, that he, in his turn, wrote (anonymously) a letter "from an Academician of Berlin to an Academician of Paris," in which some very rude things were said of his chamberlain. However, with full consciousness of this anonymous warfare, they went on supping together, till a good understanding was so far restored that Voltaire read to the king a satire which he had prepared against Maupertuis, called the "Diatribe of Doctor Akakia," wherein some of the President's favourite theories were laid hold of and run to their extreme conclusions, which lay far in the regions of absurdity. Though he greatly enjoyed the joke, Frederick laid on its author the strictest injunctions to let it go no further. Nevertheless, like so many of his productions, it was issued from a foreign press, and set everybody, in Berlin as elsewhere, laughing at the unfortunate President. The king was, naturally, very indignant. Voltaire, as usual, was ready to disclaim all knowledge of the publication, but was not believed, and endured the mortification of seeing his Diatribe burnt by the hangman. Thereupon he packed up the symbols of his favour, and returned them to the king with a verse in which he compared himself to a lover returning the portrait of his mistress. Much negotiation ensued; the king in some degree relented; and finally, Voltaire, after another brief period of apparent favour, left Berlin in May 1753, as if on a short leave of absence on account of bad health, to drink the

waters of Plombières, taking with him his Order, his gold key, and a volume of the king's poetry.

So far then, the object had been attained of withdrawing from the Prussian Court, if finally, yet without discredit, or obvious dismissal. But the real end of Voltaire's connection with the king was to be of a less pacific character. Arrived in Saxony, he could not forbear the opportunity of taking a parting shot or two at his foe the President—who, in a rage, sent him a threatening letter, drawing from Voltaire a satirical reply which once more made poor Maupertuis the laughing-stock of Europe. Hereupon the king, considering that the chamberlain had now forfeited all title to consideration, sent instructions to an official at Frankfort to stop Voltaire when on his passage to France, and to cause him to deliver up the cross, the key, and the book of verses. The poet, on arriving, was much astonished at this new demand. There was a great deal of ignoble protestation and squabbling with officials, for personal dignity was never Voltaire's strong point. On the other hand, the stupid literalness with which the German agents executed their orders entailed many unnecessary annoyances and indignities, such as must have been most grievous to one of Voltaire's excitable nature, on both him and his niece, Madame Denis, who had crossed the Rhine to meet him. At last, bereft of cross, key, and book, but with a new stock of grievances, he made his final exit from Germany in July 1753. Being by no means the man to sit patiently under an injury, he relieved his feelings by composing what he called 'Memoirs of the Life of M. de Voltaire,' in which all the king's faults and foibles, real or imaginary, as well as his literary pretensions,

were most unsparingly ridiculed. For some years this composition remained in manuscript, imparted no doubt to a favoured few; but at length, amid loud disclaimers of privity or consent on the part of the author, it found its way into print. With so much to forgive on both sides, it is more than probable that real friendship never again subsisted between them: but their alliance was of a kind that flourishes best outside the sphere of personal intimacy; and it is to the credit of both these illustrious men that in a few years they renewed an amicable correspondence, and maintained it, with mutual courtesies and good offices, till Voltaire's death, when Frederick had a solemn service performed for him in the Catholic Cathedral of Berlin, and himself composed, though in the midst of a campaign, his old servant's eulogy.

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CHAPTER XXI.

HISTORY.

WHILE he was in Prussia, 'The Age of Louis XIV.' had been published. It was probably fortunate that he was absent from France when giving it the last touches. "I have finished the work," he says, "expressly to make for myself a way to the esteem of good people. The matter is so delicate that I believe I could not have dealt with it except from a distance. History demands such freedom of truth that an historiographer of France can only write when out of France." And again :—

"I shall finish here [Potsdam] this work, which perhaps would never have been finished in Paris. The stones with which I raise this monument in honour of my country would have served to crush me. A bold word would have been called unbridled licence — the most innocent things would have been interpreted with that charity which poisons everything. See what happened to Duclos after his History of Louis XI. If he is to be my successor in historiography, as is reported, I advise him not to write except when he may make, like me, a little journey out of France."

To the advantage thus gained he joined many others for the execution of his task. He had known in his youthful days many of those men who had rendered

the earlier part of Louis's reign so splendid, and had caught the echoes of those resounding times while witnessing the disasters which clouded, in the king's last years, the glory and prosperity of France. Now, removed by age to a stand-point whence he could view the whole period as in a picture, the historian, while divested of the prejudices and illusions which beset a contemporary, still possessed, in complete maturity, his judicial faculty and his literary excellence. A finer subject could not offer itself to a Frenchman than the long reign in which France, seeming, at a bound, to emerge from a base condition of manners, of public morals, of government, and of policy, stood forth resplendent in letters, arts, arms, statecraft, and social refinement. The unerring literary judgment of Voltaire caused him to feel that in this field his fine wit and keen satire would be out of place; nor is there any irreverence in the work, for though it deals severely with the feuds of sects which hated each other, still, as he truly says, these are not religion, and he thought he was doing good service to the human intellect in rendering fanaticism hateful. And the picture he draws of Louis is especially notable. Though the historian had suffered so much from despotic power, he does full justice to the king; and while dwelling strongly and truly on such dark blots as the religious persecutions which he authorised, the impolitic wars into which his arrogance plunged him, and the miserable condition into which he allowed his people to lapse, yet the celebration of his great and kingly qualities is so generous as to form a splendid eulogy. Thus executed, the 'Age of Louis XIV.' excited less hostility, and evoked more unqualified

praise, than any of his works, and retains its popularity undiminished at the present day.

Although he recounts with pride, in his History, the triumphs of the French arms, and often makes feats of valour the theme of his verse, yet it is singular how different were his views from those of his own or any preceding age, on the subject of military glory.

"When I have asked you," he writes to Thiriot, "for anecdotes about the age of Louis XIV., it is less about his person than about the arts which have flourished in his time. I like better details of Racine and Boileau, Quinault, Lulli, Molière, Le Brun, Bossuet, Poussin, Descartes, &c., than of the battle of Steinkirk. Nothing but the name remains of those who have led battalions and squadrons. The human race gains nothing by these pitched battles. But the great men I have mentioned have prepared pure and durable pleasures for posterity. A canal which joins two seas, a picture by Poussin, a fine tragedy, a truth discovered, are a thousand times more precious than all the annals of a Court, all the records of a campaign. You know that, with me, the great men come first, the heroes last. I call great men those who have excelled in the useful or the agreeable; the pillagers of provinces are mere heroes."

In a similar vein is a little stanza which he wrote, in old age, to a lady:—

"A Hero, ravaging our sphere,
To my mind is a monstrous evil;
Far more a Founder I revere,—
This is a god, but that a devil."

By one of those grotesque caprices which are to be looked for when absolute power is exercised by a Louis XV., the author of this fine contribution to French history had already been deprived of his post of historio-

grapher, while allowed to retain that of gentleman-in-ordinary. And now, while Frenchmen, in reading these brilliant annals, felt a new pride in their nationality, the sullen dislike of the apathetic king kept the annalist excluded from the country the glory of which he had so worthily celebrated. Halting on the Rhine to wait for that permission which never came, he made Colmar his headquarters, where he spent nearly six months on a sick-bed. The disordered health of which he so frequently complained while in Prussia was due to a scorbutic affection, which, besides general injury to the system, deprived him of nearly all the remainder of his teeth—and from this disease he had not yet recovered. It was while on his way to drink the waters of Plombières that he halted at the Abbey of Sénones, as already mentioned. The Abbot, Calmet, was himself a man of letters—the library was almost the finest in France, and especially rich in rare medieval literature; and here, for a month, Voltaire led the life of a veritable Benedictine, spending his days in making extracts from these old books, and sharing the meals of the monks in their refectory, while the old Abbot constantly pleased himself with the thought that he was on the point of making a convert of his sceptical guest.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOLDSMITH AND VOLTAIRE.

FINDING that there was no hope of permission to live in Paris, he bought, in 1754, a pretty country house near Geneva, which he called "The Delights," from the beauty of the grounds and the prospects—and, shortly after, he purchased Monrion, near Lausanne, and also a house in that town. His constantly increasing fame had made him a great power in the State; the senseless dislike of the king had made him a hostile power; and it was rather as a formidable rival than as an exiled subject that he now forged and sent forth his literary bolts from the frontiers of the monarchy. A more sagacious policy might have endeavoured to conciliate so active a foe, but that was not the way of those who ruled France. To live a gay, easy, irresponsible life; to consider taxation as the one function of government, the one purpose for which the people existed; to clap into the Bastille anybody whose notions tended to cast a doubt on the excellence of this kind of administration; to contemplate, as possible, the coming of the deluge, but to think it of no great consequence so that it did not come in their time,—such was, and had long been, the policy of those who

controlled the destinies of the country. So, for more than twenty years, the old champion of letters and of humanity dwelt near the Lake of Geneva, with more real freedom and comfort and leisure than he had ever enjoyed in his life; and his at length settled residence now became a point of attraction for pilgrims who desired to do homage to his fame. Among other noted Englishmen came Goldsmith. English readers know very well that, as a young man, the author of the "Traveller" wandered, almost penniless, but always cheerful and observant, over great part of Europe. In 1759 he undertook to write for a publisher a life of Voltaire, which appeared in an obscure magazine. In this notice—which contains, as Goldsmith's biographer, Forster, thinks, the best account existing of Voltaire's residence in England—he says that he was in company with the French poet in Paris. That, as our readers know, could not have been; and Forster considers that the passage may have been tampered with by the editor of the magazine, or may even have been inadvertently so recorded by Goldsmith himself, but does not doubt that the meeting, the account of which thus goes on, took place at "The Delights:"—

"As a companion, no man ever exceeded him when he pleased to lead the conversation; which, however, was not always the case. In company which he either disliked or despised, few could be more reserved than he; but when he was warmed in discourse, and had got over a hesitating manner which sometimes he was subject to, it was rapture to hear him. His meagre visage seemed insensibly to gather beauty; every muscle in it had meaning, and his eye beamed with unusual brightness.

"The person who writes this memoir, who had the honour and the pleasure of being his acquaintance, remembers to

have seen him in a select company of wits of both sexes at Paris, when the subject happened to turn upon English taste and learning. Fontenelle, who was of the party, and who was unacquainted with the language or authors of the country he undertook to condemn, with a spirit truly vulgar began to revile both. Diderot, who liked the English, and knew something of their literary pretensions, attempted to vindicate their poetry and learning, but with unequal abilities. The company quickly perceived that Fontenelle was superior in the dispute, and were surprised at the silence which Voltaire had preserved all the former part of the night, particularly as the conversation happened to turn upon one of his favourite topics. Fontenelle continued his triumph till about twelve o'clock, when Voltaire appeared at last roused from his reverie. His whole frame seemed animated. He began his defence with the utmost elegance mixed with spirit, and now and then let fall the finest strokes of raillery upon his antagonist; and his harangue lasted till three in the morning. I must confess that, whether from national partiality or from the elegant sensibility of his manner, I never was so much charmed, nor did I ever remember so absolute a victory as he gained in this dispute."

In 1760 a false report of Voltaire's death produced, in reply to attacks on his memory, a eulogy from Goldsmith, in the character of his Chinese philosopher. It is most generous and appreciative—he mourns the loss which the world suffers in the death of a philosopher of genius such as nature scarcely produces once in a century, praises his independence, rectitude, and detestation of sycophancy, and condemns his calumniators:—

"Should you look for the character of Voltaire among the journalists and illiterate writers of the age, you will find him there characterised as a monster, with a head turned to wisdom, and a heart inclining to vice—the powers of his mind and the baseness of his principles forming a detestable con-

trast. But seek for his character among writers like himself, and you will find him very differently described. You perceive him, in their accounts, possessed of good nature, humanity, greatness of soul, fortitude, and almost every virtue : in this description those who might be supposed best acquainted with his character are unanimous. The royal Prussian, D'Argens, Diderot, D'Alembert, and Fontenelle conspire in drawing the picture, in describing the friend of man, and the patron of every rising genius."

And (still through the medium of the contemplative Chinese) Goldsmith thus gently expresses his toleration of Voltaire's heresies: "I am not displeased with my brother because he happens to ask our Father for favours in a different manner from me."

CHAPTER XXIII.

POEM ON THE EARTHQUAKE, AND CANDIDE

In the year 1755 occurred the great earthquake of Lisbon, which destroyed that capital and a vast number of its inhabitants. Such a visitation could not but produce a profound impression throughout Europe; but no one so strongly evinced his feelings on the occasion as Voltaire. He had always been revolted by the form of philosophy called Optimism, which regards everything that takes place in the universe as inevitably right, because forming part of a general divine plan. Many years before, it had been expounded, after a not too intelligible fashion, by the philosopher Leibnitz. Shaftesbury, followed by Bolingbroke, had maintained it in England; and Pope, following both, had versified it in his "Essay on Man," condensing it in the well-known couplet—

> "And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, whatever is is right."

This doctrine appeared to Voltaire not only illogical as making evil an element of good, not only irreverent as making crime and suffering part of the intention of Providence, but of injurious effect on humanity as tending to

inculcate an inert resignation to those ills which it is man's duty to endeavour to remedy. In the article in his 'Philosophical Dictionary' entitled "Bien, tout est bien," he thus sets forth a part of his argument:—

"I pray you, gentlemen, to explain to me your 'all is good,' for I do not understand it.

"Does this signify all is arranged, all is ordained, just as in the theory of moving forces? I understand and concur in that.

"Or, do you mean that every one is well-off, has wherewithal to live, and that nobody suffers? You know very well that is false.

"Or, is it your notion that the lamentable calamities which afflict the earth are good in relation to God, and rejoice Him? I do not believe this horror, nor do you.

. . . . . .

"'There are no evils,' says Pope in his Fourth Epistle on the 'All is for the best;' 'if there are particular evils they make up the general good.' A strange general good!—composed of all diseases, all crimes, all sufferings, death and perdition. . . .

"This system of 'all for the best' represents the Author of nature as a ruler powerful and evil, who does not trouble Himself that a multitude of men should perish, and that others should drag out their days in want and in tears, so long as His designs are accomplished. The opinion that this is the best of all possible worlds, far from being consolatory, is well calculated to reduce the philosophers who embrace it to despair. The question of good and evil remains a hopeless chaos for those who examine it in good faith; and for disputants it is merely an intellectual game—they are galley slaves, who sport with their chains."

His thoughts on the subject underwent a sudden and strong concentration at the news of the unparalleled horrors of the earthquake. Moved, as he always was, to re-

produce his strongest feelings in some literary form, he cast his protest against Optimism into the two very different shapes of the "Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon" and the novel of 'Candide,' which both testify to what his other writings so frequently evince—namely, that beneath the mental activity, the vivacity, and the satirical gaiety of Voltaire, lay the profoundest sense of the hapless condition of humanity, and the liveliest sympathy with its sorrows.

The poem begins with a picture of the ruined city; and the poet asks what the mangled inhabitants had done, more than the populations of London and Paris, to merit such a visitation. He invites the Optimist to contemplate the scene, and asks him if the universe would have been in a worse condition without this infernal gulf which had swallowed Lisbon? and if he would so limit the Supreme Power as to forbid it to exercise clemency? Will it, he asks, console the wretched inhabitants of the desolated city to be told that they suffer for the good of the world, that other hands will rebuild their shattered homes, that the towns of the north will be enriched by their ruin, and that all their sufferings are a benefit in the general scheme of law? These unchangeable laws of necessity the poet does not believe in: God, he says, holds in His hand the chain which binds the system of the universe, and is not Himself bound by it; He is free, just, and not implacable. Why, then, do we suffer under His rule?—ah! there is the fatal knot which we want untied.

The elements, the animal world, the human race, all are at war, and Evil has sway on the earth. Does it come from the Author of all good? Or is He opposed

by a Principle of Evil, like the Persian Ariman? The poet refuses to believe in such odious monsters, of whom the trembling world once made gods, and pursues his argument thus:—

"Can we conceive a God beneficent
Upon His children's happiness intent,
Yet on them sorrows sparing not to heap?
What eye can penetrate designs so deep?
Through the All-perfect how can ill befall?
Yet how have other source, since He rules all?
Still evil's everywhere: Confusion dense!
Sad puzzle, far too hard for human sense!
A God came down to shed some balm around,
Surveyed the earth, and left it as He found!
His power to mend, the sophist loud denies;
He wanted but the will, another cries:
And while the disputants their views proclaim,
Lisbon is perishing in gulfs of flame,
And thirty towns with ashes strew the lea
From Tagus' ravaged borders to the sea.

"Does God with evil scourge a guilty race?
Or does the Lord of Being and of Space,
Unswayed by pity's touch, or anger's force,
Of His fixed will just watch the changeless course?
Does formless matter, rebel to its Lord,
Bear in itself the seeds of disaccord?
Maybe God proves us, and our sojourn here
Is but a passage to the eternal sphere.
Fleeting, though sharp, the griefs that on us press;
And death, in ending them, but comes to bless.
Yet, when we issue from his dreadful gate,
Who may presume to claim a happier fate?

"Tremble we must, howe'er the riddle's read,
And, knowing nothing, we have all to dread.
Nature is mute, we question her in vain,

And feel that God alone can make all plain.
None other can expound His mysteries,
Console the feeble and illume the wise.
Left guideless, erring, where no way is seen,
Man seeks in vain some reeds on which to lean.

. . . . . .

"What of all this can wisest minds explain?
Nothing—the book of fate must closed remain.
What am I, whence have come, and whither go?
This men still ask, and this can never know.
Atoms, tormented on this heap of earth,
Whom death devours, whom fate finds stuff for mirth,
Yet atoms that can think, whose daring eyes,
Guided by thought, have measured out the skies.
Depths of the infinite our spirits sound,
But never pierce the veil that wraps us round.

"This scene of pride and error and distress,
With wretches swarms who prate of happiness;
Wailing, they comfort seek—none wish to quit
This life, nor, quitting, would re-enter it.
Sometimes while sighing our sad hours away,
We find some joy that sheds a passing ray;
But pleasure, wavering shadow, rests not long,
While griefs and failures come in endless throng.
Mournful the past, the present veiled in gloom,
If life and thought be ended in the tomb.

"*One day all will be well*—our hope there see!
All is well now—behold a phantasy!
Humble in plaint, and patient to endure,
I doubt not Providence because obscure.
In strains less mournful did I erewhile raise
As gentle Pleasure's bard the song of praise;
But time brings change. Taught by my lengthening span,
Sharing the feebleness of feeble man,
Amid thick darkness seeking still for day,
I only know to suffer and obey.

"Once on a time, a Caliph, nigh to death,
To Heaven thus offered his expiring breath:
'I bring thee, O sole King, almighty Lord!
All that thy boundless realm can ne'er afford;
Sins, ignorance, regrets, and efforts vain.
He might have added 'hope,' to cheer the train."

These views being set forth in solemn guise in the poem, 'Candide' was written to show the grotesque side of the same argument, and to indulge another and equally characteristic mood of the writer. To take a professor of optimism and his disciple, and to cause them to pass through such a series of misfortunes as the conditions of the world in Voltaire's time might bring upon them, constituted the whole plan of the piece; and it is obvious that, to render the satire effective, the evils of the world, and the sufferings of the characters, should be treated with the indifference which an optimist would naturally feel for them. But Madame de Staël, actuated by the desire which so many of Voltaire's critics seem to feel, to say something forcible and original about him and his writings, without much regard for clearness or justice of application, thus delivers herself on the subject of 'Candide.' "Voltaire took a singular dislike to final causes, optimism, free-will" (which is not the fact), "in fine, to all philosophical opinions which raise the dignity of man; and he wrote 'Candide,' that work, the gaiety of which may be styled infernal, for it seems written by a being of a nature other than ours, indifferent to our lot, satisfied with our sufferings, and laughing like a demon or an ape at the miseries of the human race, with which he has nothing in common." As if this mode of treatment had not been specially adopted to exhibit optimism in a ridi-

culous light; and as if the author of the Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon could be characterised as indifferent to the sufferings of humanity! But Voltaire has suffered many things of many critics.

'Candide' seems to have been but little understood on its first appearance, being regarded as a mere narrative of adventure; but it has come to be considered by many as the writer's cleverest work. A few extracts will serve to show how the plan was executed:—

"He was named Candide because he had, with a sound judgment, a simple mind. He was supposed to be the nephew of the Baron with whom he lived, and who was one of the most powerful lords in Westphalia, for his chateau had a door and windows. The preceptor Pangloss, the oracle of the house, taught the metaphysico-theologo-cosmolonigologie. 'It is demonstrable,' said he, 'that things could not be otherwise; for all being done for an end, all is necessarily for the best end. Observe well that noses are made to carry spectacles—and we have spectacles. Legs are visibly instituted for breeches—and we have breeches. Stones have been formed to be hewed and to make chateaus—and my lord the Baron has a very fine chateau; pigs were made to be eaten—and we eat pork all the year round: consequently those who have affirmed that all is well have uttered a folly; what ought to be said is, that all is the best.'"

From this best of all possible chateaus Candide is expelled for making love to Miss Cunegonde, the baron's daughter, and is presently inveigled into enlisting in the service of the King of Bulgaria; and after undergoing some dreadful military punishments,

"he had already a little skin, and could march again, when the King of the Bulgarians gave battle to the King of the Abares.

"Nothing could be so fine, so smart, so brilliant, so well

ordered as the two armies. The trumpets, the fifes, the hautboys, the drums, the cannon, formed a harmony such as is not to be met with out of hell. The artillery first tumbled over nearly six thousand on each side; then the musketry rid the best of worlds of about nine or ten thousand other rascals who infested its surface. The bayonet was the sufficient reason of the death of several thousand more. The total might amount to about thirty thousand souls. Candide, who trembled like a philosopher, hid himself as well as he could during this heroic butchery."

"At last, while the two kings caused the 'Te deum' to be sung, each in his camp," Candide found the opportunity of running away. He meets a beggar all covered with sores, the end of his nose corroded, his mouth on one side, his teeth black, tormented with a violent cough, and spitting out a tooth at each paroxysm. The phantom looks fixedly at him, and then leaps on his neck: "'Alas!' said this wretch to the other, 'don't you recognise your dear Pangloss?'" The philosopher recounts the misfortunes which have brought him into this condition,' but is none the less persuaded that they were all for the best, and that this is the best of all possible worlds. He gets cured, and "only lost one eye and one ear." They are shipwrecked near Lisbon—all perish except the two adventurers and the greatest rascal in the ship; and they come to land just in time to see the city destroyed by an earthquake:—

"Some falling stones had hurt Candide: he was stretched in the street covered with rubbish. He called to Pangloss—'Oh, get me a little wine and oil—I am a dead man.' 'This earthquake is nothing new,' said Pangloss: 'the city of Lima experienced similar shocks last year—like causes, like effects: there is certainly a train of sulphur underground from Lima to Lisbon.' 'Nothing more likely,' said Candide; 'but, for

heaven's sake, a little oil and wine!' 'How—likely?' returned the philosopher, 'I maintain the thing is demonstrated.' Candide lost consciousness, and Pangloss brought him a little water."

Pangloss's philosophy gets him into trouble with the familiars of the Holy Inquisition:—

"After the earthquake, which had destroyed three-fourths of Lisbon, the sages of the land had found no more effectual means of preventing total ruin than to give the people a fine *auto-da-fé:* it was decided by the University of Coimbra that the spectacle of many persons burnt at a slow fire, with grand ceremonies, was an infallible mode of preventing earthquakes.

"Consequently, a Biscayan had been seized who was convicted of having married his godmother, and two Portuguese who, in eating a pullet, had put aside the bacon. Dr Pangloss and his disciple were bound together, the one for having spoken, the other for having listened with an air of approbation. They were conducted separately to apartments of an extreme freshness, into which the sun never intruded. A week afterwards they were dressed each in a sanbenito and their heads ornamented with paper mitres. Candide's mitre and sanbenito were painted with inverted flames and with devils destitute of tails or claws; but the devils of Pangloss had both claws and tails, and the flames were upright. Thus apparelled they marched in procession, and listened to a very pathetic sermon, followed by fine music in counterpoint. During the singing, Candide was whipt in time to the music; the Biscayan, and the two men who did not like bacon with their fowl, were burnt, and Pangloss was hanged. The same day there was a fresh earthquake with a dreadful noise.

"Candide, terrified, speechless, bleeding, palpitating, said to himself: 'If this is the best of all possible worlds, what can the rest be?'"

He meets again with Cunegonde: and such adventures

befall both, that they agree in thinking it a pity that Pangloss should have been hanged,—"he would have said the most admirable things to us about the physical and moral evil that cover the earth," said Cunegonde, "and I should have found strength sufficient to dare to raise some respectful objections."

Among his other adventures Candide approaches the English coast and enters the harbour of Portsmouth. He there sees the execution, on board a neighbouring ship, of Admiral Byng:—

"'Why put this admiral to death?' 'Tis because he has not killed people enough—he fought a French admiral, and it is considered that he did not get near enough to him.' 'But,' said Candide, 'the French admiral kept as far from him as he from the French admiral.' 'That is not to be disputed,' was the reply; but in this country it is good to put an admiral to death from time to time, to encourage the others.'"

He meets at Venice a number of dethroned monarchs—among others, King Stanislaus; but it is not necessary to pursue his adventures further, as the extracts given appear sufficiently to indicate the plan and style.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA.

A MEMORABLE work, in which Voltaire was greatly interested, was at this time attracting public attention. The 'French Encyclopedia,' which counts for something more than a great literary achievement, had its origin in a translation of the 'English Encyclopedia' of Chambers, published in 1728. Some of the most eminent men of letters in France took part in the French work, forming a body that came to be known as the Encyclopedists—a title which in its later acceptation signified enunciators of bold and subversive modes of thought. D'Alembert, a man of science, and a friend of Voltaire, whose junior he was by more than twenty years, and Diderot, already famous in philosophy and letters, first gave distinct form to the project, which was to bring together in one work full information respecting all the sciences, and all the arts, in their existing stages and conditions, and thus to render it a delineation of the progress of the human mind and of civilisation. The extent and numerous branches of this design rendered necessary the co-operation of many skilled writers: some of the most noted men of science and of letters in France took part, as Helvetius,

author of the once celebrated book on 'L'Esprit;' Buffon, the famous naturalist; Turgot, afterwards Minister of Finance; and Condorcet. Except Turgot, all these philosophers were free-thinkers, and were convinced that the policy and abuses of the Church in France were the great obstacles to the enlightenment of the nation. But the time had by no means arrived when they could venture to be completely outspoken. The authorities both of Church and State felt instinctively that their power rested mainly on the ignorance of the people, of whose welfare, temporal and spiritual, they took small thought; and their interest in science and literature was almost entirely of a repressive kind. It was necessary, therefore, for the Encyclopedists to insinuate their theories, whether of science or theology, in a covert or apologetic way. Nevertheless, the jealousy of the priesthood was aroused, the early volumes were suppressed, and it was only after many conflicts with authority, which tended to increase its popularity and fame, that the 'Encyclopedia' attained to a far more than national celebrity. None of the views therein set forth would be considered extreme in the present day. On the contrary, works of philosophy and religion that bring their authors high repute and esteem are published every day, which seem to have made a starting-point of the theories of the French philosophers. It might even be possible to name English divines who would be puzzled to define the points in which they differ from those unorthodox theologians. But things are to be considered with reference to their time: these views then excited hatred and fear; and on the school, and Voltaire the head of the school, obloquy was so lavishly poured that the stains have never left

them. All the enjoyers of privilege and authority,—all the lesser people whose interest it was to propitiate these — all who, knowing nothing of the questions, wished to obtain a cheap repute for orthodoxy and loyalty,—joined with those who honestly believed in the mischievous tendencies of free thought to denounce its advocates. They were charged with being not only the enemies of Church and State, which they were, but of morality and order, which they were not. But at the same time there were great numbers of people, especially in England, who lamented the condition of the French nation, and who regarded Voltaire and his disciples as its benefactors. Thus no cold medium was observed in estimating him; all were either persecutors or proselytes, and he stood aloft in all the prominence of a symbol of conflict.

As the sharer, or inspirer, of the views of the Encyclopedists, and the intimate friend of D'Alembert, the editor, Voltaire took an ardent interest in their work, and contributed many articles on a great diversity of subjects. Finding, at length, that, though this was an excellent mode of expression for himself, articles were often inserted of which he did not approve, he established an independent outlet of thought, of a similar kind, in his 'Philosophical Dictionary,' in which, following the alphabetical form of arrangement, he brought together a vast variety of short essays on subjects of literature, politics, theology, grammar, and physical science, written in styles which, always attractive, were various as their matter. It may serve to rescue him from a common and ignorant accusation to give here a few extracts from the article "Atheist," in which is set forth the idea discussed of old

by Plutarch, that though to have no religion is very bad, yet to have a cruel and immoral religion is worse:—

"There have been many atheists among Christians; their number is now much diminished. What looks like a paradox, but which on examination will prove to be a truth, is that theology has often precipitated minds into atheism, while philosophy has rescued them from it. It was in fact pardonable in men to doubt of a Divinity, when the only persons who asserted it disputed as to its nature. The first Fathers of the Church nearly all represented the Supreme Power as corporeal; others followed who, giving it no more extent, lodged it in a certain part of the sky: according to some the Deity had created the world in time; according to others He had created time."

After enumerating some hotly-disputed points of theology, such as even now agitate the Catholic world, he goes on:—

"When the confidants of the Divinity were seen to agree so little among themselves, and to pronounce curses against each other from age to age, while all agreed in their uncontrolled thirst for riches and grandeur; when, in another direction, the view rests on the prodigious number of crimes and misfortunes with which the earth was beset, and of which so many were caused by the disputes of these very masters of souls,—it must be confessed that it seemed permissible to a reasonable man to doubt the reality of a being so strangely announced, and to a sympathetic man to imagine that a God who had voluntarily created so many unfortunates could have no existence.

"A philosopher has been given to the world, who has discovered by what simple and sublime laws all the celestial bodies move in the abyss of space. Thus the work of the universe, better known, shows a workman; and so many laws, always constant, prove a legislator. Sound philosophy has thus destroyed that atheism to which an obscure theology lent weapons."

After producing many of the arguments used by atheists, and discussing them, he says :—

"The philosopher who recognises a God has with him a crowd of probabilities equivalent to certainty, while the atheist has nothing but doubts. . . . It is evident that, in morals, it is most important to recognise a deity. It is certainly for the interest of all men that there should be a divinity who punishes what human justice cannot repress; but it is also clear that it is better not to recognise a God than to adore a barbarous deity, to whom human beings are sacrificed, as has been done by so many nations. . . . It is certain that atheism is not taught in the schools of China, yet many scholars there are atheists, because they are only imperfect philosophers. But it is certainly much better to live with them at Pekin, enjoying all the gentleness of their manners and laws, than to be liable in Goa to groan in chains in the prisons of the Inquisition, and to be brought from them, arrayed in a robe of brimstone colour embroidered with devils, to die at the stake."

And he thus sums up his conclusions :—

"Atheism and fanaticism are two monsters, which rend and devour society; but the atheist, in his error, preserves the reason which cuts his claws, while those of the fanatic are sharpened in the incessant madness which afflicts him."

It is easy to understand that neither Jesuits nor Jansenists would approve of writings which dealt thus with their quarrels, any more than the Romish clergy generally would like his ridicule of such modern miracles as, even now, an amazed world is sometimes called on to credit. Talking of a chronicler of these marvels he says :—

"He assures us that a little monk was so much accustomed to perform miracles that the Prior forbade him to exercise his talent. The little monk obeyed; but seeing a poor tiler fall from a roof he hesitated between the desire to save his life

and the holy law of obedience. He therefore only ordained that the tiler should remain in the air to await fresh orders, and ran to report the state of things to his Prior. The Prior gave him absolution for the sin which he had committed in beginning a miracle without permission, and allowed him to finish it, provided he ended there, and did not repeat the practice."

And, in a vein equally likely to conciliate the clergy, he thus speaks "of Fanaticism:"—

"Some one spreads a rumour in the world that there is a giant in existence 70 feet high. Very soon all the doctors discuss the questions what colour his hair must be, what is the size of his thumb, what the dimensions of his nails; there is outcry, caballing, fighting; those who maintain that the giant's little finger is only an inch and a half in diameter, bring those to the stake who affirm that the little finger is a foot thick. 'But, gentlemen, does your giant exist?' says a bystander, modestly. 'What a horrible doubt!' cry all the disputants; 'what blasphemy! what absurdity!' Then they all make a little truce to stone the bystander, and, after having assassinated him in due form, in a manner the most edifying, they fight among themselves, as before, on the subject of the little finger and the nails."

CHAPTER XXV.

LIFE AT LAUSANNE AND FERNEY.

A GLIMPSE of Voltaire, while he lived at Lausanne in 1757-58, is afforded by the historian Gibbon, then a youth of twenty, who had been sent thither to complete his education, and who thus records their acquaintance in his Autobiography :—

"Before I was recalled from Switzerland, I had the satisfaction of seeing the most extraordinary man of the age,—a poet, a historian, a philosopher, who has filled thirty quartos of prose and verse with his various productions, often excellent, and always entertaining. Need I add the name of Voltaire? After forfeiting, by his own misconduct, the friendship of the first of kings, he retired, at the age of sixty, with a plentiful fortune, to a free and beautiful country, and resided two winters (1757 and 1758) in the town and neighbourhood of Lausanne. My desire of beholding Voltaire, whom I then rated above his real magnitude, was easily gratified. He received me with civility as an English youth, but I cannot boast of any peculiar notice or distinction,—*Virgilium vidi tantum.*

"The ode which he composed on his first arrival on the banks of the Leman Lake, '*O Maison d'Aristippe! O Jardin d'Epicure,*' &c., had been imparted as a secret to the gentleman by whom I was introduced. He allowed me to read it

twice; I knew it by heart; and as my discretion was not equal to my memory, the author was soon displeased by the circulation of a copy. In writing this trivial anecdote, I wished to observe whether my memory was impaired, and I have the comfort of finding that every line of the poem is still engraved in fresh and indelible characters. The highest gratification which I derived from Voltaire's residence at Lausanne was the uncommon circumstance of hearing a great poet declaim his own productions on the stage. He had formed a company of gentlemen and ladies, some of whom were not destitute of talents. A decent theatre was framed at Monrepos,[1] a country house at the end of a suburb; dresses and scenes were provided at the expense of the actors; and the author directed the rehearsals with the zeal and attention of paternal love. In two successive winters his tragedies of 'Zaire,' 'Alzire,' 'Zulime,' and his sentimental comedy of the 'Enfant Prodigue,' were played at the theatre of Monrepos. Voltaire represented the characters best adapted to his years,—Lusignan, Alvarez, Benassar, Euphemon. His declamation was fashioned to the pomp and cadence of the old stage, and he expressed the enthusiasm of poetry rather than the feelings of nature. My ardour, which soon became conspicuous, seldom failed of procuring me a ticket. The habits of pleasure fortified my taste for the French theatre, and that taste has perhaps abated my idolatry for the gigantic genius of Shakespeare, which is inculcated from our infancy as the first duty of an Englishman. The wit and philosophy of Voltaire, his table and theatre, refined, in a visible degree, the manners of Lausanne; and, however addicted to study, I enjoyed my share of the amusements of society. After the representation of Monrepos, I sometimes supped with the actors."

This taste for directing theatrical representations Voltaire had in common with one who, perhaps, may alone contest his pre-eminence in the field of letters,

[1] Gibbon's misnomer for Monrion.

and who gave so much of his time and interest to the theatre at Weimar. On acquiring the estate of Ferney in 1759, on the western shore of the lake, he built a theatre, the ruins of which still exist, and the conduct of which continued to afford him extraordinary delight. On one occasion, while seated watching the performance of "Zaire" from the side-scenes, he became so excited as the catastrophe approached, that he wheeled his arm-chair on to the stage, and continued unconsciously to press forward till he got between the actors, so that Orosman was unable to stab the heroine. This or any other fancy he could well afford to indulge, for his income was great, and far beyond his expenses. He had about £7000 a-year,—a princely revenue in those days; and one of his Parisian visitors observed that he was the only man in France who really lived like a grand seigneur. He kept an extremely hospitable and well-supplied table, habitually entertaining a great number of guests, and maintaining a large establishment of servants. The audience at his plays were always entertained at supper, and the repast was sometimes followed by a ball. Besides building a theatre, he pulled down the ruinous church of Ferney and replaced it with another at his own cost, which bore the inscription, *Deo erexit Voltaire.* "The church that I have built," he wrote, "is the only church in the universe that is dedicated to God alone—all the others are dedicated to saints. For my part, I would rather build for the master than the valets." He built also the chateau of Ferney, and surrounded it with gardens in the English taste, and drained and improved the surrounding land. The neighbouring hamlet, in which a few miserable labourers inhabited dilapidated cottages, gave place to a small town,

built at his cost, and tenanted by skilful workmen, whose branch of industry he encouraged and rendered prosperous. "Fifteen years ago," says a guest, writing when Voltaire was eighty-four, "there were barely at Ferney three or four cottages, and forty inhabitants; now it is astonishing to see a numerous and civilised colony, a theatre, and more than a hundred pretty houses." His charities were munificent. When the order of Jesuits was suppressed he took one of the body, Father Adam, into his house, and made him his almoner, a post which was far from being a sinecure. He also received into his family Mademoiselle Corneille, the grandniece of the poet, whom he thus rescued from poverty: "It is giving," he said, "to an old soldier the opportunity of being useful to the daughter of his general." He welcomed her warmly, always spoke of her with praise, treated her like a young relation, and gave her for a marriage portion the profits of his "Commentaries on Corneille."

A description is given of him in his last days at Ferney, seated under a vine, on the occasion of a *fête*, and receiving the congratulations and complimentary gifts of his tenantry and neighbours, when a young lady, whom he had adopted, brought him in a basket a pair of white doves with pink beaks, as her offering. He afterwards entertained about 200 guests at a splendid repast, followed by illuminations, songs, and dances, and was himself so carried away in an access of gaiety as to throw his hat into the air. But his merriment ended in a tempest of wrath; for learning, in the course of the evening, that the two doves which had figured so prettily in the *fête* had been killed for the table, his indignation at the stolid cruelty which could shed the

blood of the creatures they had all just admired and caressed, knew no bounds.

He constituted himself the champion of those whom he considered oppressed. His remark on the death of Admiral Byng, that he had been executed "to encourage the others," is well known; it is not, perhaps, so well known that he interfered actively to prevent the catastrophe. The commander of the successful expedition which Byng was expected to frustrate was Voltaire's friend, the Duke of Richelieu, and from him he begged for such a letter as might exonerate the unfortunate Admiral, then on his trial. After the evidence given at the court-martial was closed, a letter from Voltaire to Byng, written in English, was read: "Sir, though I am almost unknown to you, I think 'tis my duty to send you the copy of the letter which I have just received from the Marshal Duc de Richelieu; honour, humanity, and equity order me to convey it to your hands. The noble and unexpected testimony from one of the most candid, as well as most generous, of my countrymen, makes me presume your judges will do you justice."

He endeavoured, in a succession of cases, to obtain justice for the victims of judicial blunders. A young man, named Calas, had committed suicide by hanging himself. A ridiculous charge was brought against his father, a Calvinist, of having hanged him in order to prevent him from becoming a Roman Catholic. The mob, sagacious and tender as mobs usually are, credited the accusation and clamoured for his execution; the clergy were willing to see a useful example made; the parliament of Toulouse gave judgment against him, and

he was broken on the wheel. His case was thus beyond the reach of remedy; but the same judgment had condemned his family to infamy. Voltaire, utterly disbelieving even the possibility of the alleged crime, used his credit, his friends, and his money in behalf of the family, employed advocates, and himself urged their innocence in various appeals. He thus obtained a revision and reversal of the sentence. In a similar case, that of Sirven, he saved the life, by his indefatigable efforts, of the accused man; and afterwards obtained the acquittal of a woman whose husband had, on an incredible charge, been broken on the wheel, and who had been condemned with him. The case of Lally, who was executed in Paris under circumstances of atrocious injustice, is also well known: in this instance Voltaire's efforts failed of success, yet he had the satisfaction, many years afterwards, of seeing the sentence condemned, on a revision obtained by the victim's son. Other cases are recorded in which his sympathy with the oppressed had impelled him to untiring efforts in their behalf. It must be admitted that, though he alone can be called perfectly good who fulfils two orders of duties, one of these, his duty to his fellow-man, was performed with unusual spirit by Voltaire.

All this time the increasing weight of years by no means diminished the activity of his pen. In 1757 the whole of his works were for the first time published in an authorised and complete edition, under his direction at Geneva. He wrote in this last epoch of his life the Essay on the "Philosophy of History," from which extracts have been already given; added a sketch of the "Age of Louis XV." to its predecessor; wrote a history

of "Peter the Great" to please his admirer and correspondent the Empress Catherine; employed himself at intervals on his 'Philosophical Dictionary;' produced many fresh tragedies (not always equal to the earlier ones) and four comedies; innumerable tales and satires in verse, and many occasional poems; many novelettes, too, in the style of "Zadig;" and a host of papers in prose. Several of the most telling satires were prompted by a personal attack which had been made on Voltaire. A M. Le Franc de Pompignan had been elected to the French Academy, and had conceived the unlucky idea of giving point to his inaugural discourse by censorious remarks on the philosopher and some of his disciples, who were also members of the Academy. On learning this, Voltaire discharged on the aggressor such a deluge of ridicule that he never again dared to show his face in the Academy, and, instead of vanishing quietly from the world, has remained pickled for posterity. And, all the time, flowed on in full stream that copious correspondence, never intended for publication, but which is esteemed as a most precious example of letter-writing, and which of itself would seem to constitute the labour of an industrious life.

In the correspondence with his friend and brother-philosopher, D'Alembert, is seen more clearly than elsewhere what it was that he had all his life considered it his mission to battle against. The nature of his creed will have been recognised in the extracts from his works already given, and he would probably have considered Pope's "Universal Prayer" as exactly expressing it. The morality of the New Testament was altogether in

unison with that creed and with his own frequently-expressed views of the obligations which man's conscience enjoins; but he put no faith in the morality of the Old Testament, nor in the miracles of Scripture. He had the strongest belief in the elevating effects of developing the human intellect: to this he considered the Catholic Church and Clergy as systematically opposed; and hence his unceasing hostility to them. While the mind of the time saw before it the prospects, so full of promise, which the great movements of the sixteenth century had opened, the dominant religious body opposed a rigid bar to progress, not only in the doctrines which it inculcated, but in its system of education, which, dealing well and thoroughly with the learning of the past, sought to arrest, in all directions, the advance of thought. It is in writing to D'Alembert that he frequently insists on the necessity of putting an end to what he designates as "the Infamous:"—

"I want you to crush the Infamous—that is the great point. It must be reduced to the position which it occupies in England: 'tis the greatest service that can be rendered to the human race. You will perceive that I speak only of superstition; as for religion, I love and respect it as you do."

Afterwards, D'Alembert, in a letter to Voltaire, defines very clearly the views of both:—

"For me, who see everything just now in a rose-coloured light, I think I behold the Jansenists perishing next year, after having, this year, brought the Jesuits to a violent end—toleration established, the Protestants recalled, priests mar-

ried, confession abolished, and fanaticism crushed without one being aware of it."

Had these mutineers been Englishmen they would have found nothing to quarrel with, and would never have made themselves conspicuous for hostility to any system of faith.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS LAST YEARS.

As years went on and found him still by the Lake, he became known as "the Patriarch of Ferney;" and as he kept himself incessantly before the public by his writings, and with constantly increasing fame, the tide of visitors continued to augment in numbers and importance. It became necessary for people with intellectual pretensions to make at least one pilgrimage to the modern Mecca, where they might have the advantage of hearing the prophet explain his own doctrines; and the learned and the great, men of all professions and beliefs, literary ladies and fashionable ladies, came to render their incessant homage, or to gratify their ardent curiosity. It must have been in the year 1764, or 1765, that he received a very remarkable visitor indeed; no less a person than Boswell, who had then undergone the anguish of separation from his revered friend, whom he had left "rolling his majestick frame in his usual manner" on the pier at Harwich, in order to make a tour on the Continent. He quite appreciated Voltaire's celebrity, if not his genius, and referred afterwards, in his conversations with Johnson, to "when I was at Ferney;" where

it appears that the patriarch, affecting, says Boswell, the English style of expression, characterised the illustrious sage of Fleet Street as "a superstitious dog," but, after hearing a disparaging remark of Johnson's about Frederick the Great, he exclaimed, "An honest fellow!" This, with a remark about Pope and Dryden, is all the record that the prince of recorders brought away from Ferney. Had there been room in his very exclusive Pantheon for more than one deity, we might have learned much about Voltaire which now will never be known, but which the irrepressible interest of Boswell would easily have extracted,—as thus: "Finding my illustrious host in a specially communicative humour, I ventured to say, 'The world, sir, would be very glad to know why you call yourself Voltaire,'"—or, "Talking, at dinner, of his confinement in the Bastille, I expressed my wonder that notwithstanding the injuries he had received from the Government he had never attacked it, but only the priesthood; to which he replied,"—what can now only be matter of speculation.

It was several years after this that Doctor Burney, father of the once famous authoress of 'Evelina,' paid a diffident visit to Ferney, having no introduction. After describing the scenery, the church, the theatre, the buildings, and the chateau itself, into which he was allowed to penetrate, "a very neat and elegant house, not large nor affectedly decorated," he had sight of the great man:—

"He was going to his workmen. My heart leaped at the sight of so extraordinary a man. He had just then quitted his garden, and was crossing the court before his house. Seeing my chaise, and me on the point of mounting it, he made

a sign to his servant, who had been my *cicerone*, to go to him; in order, I suppose, to inquire who I was. After they had exchanged a few words together he approached the place where I was standing motionless, in order to contemplate his person as much as I could while his eyes were turned from me; but on seeing him move towards me, I found myself drawn by some irresistible power towards him; and without knowing what I did, I insensibly met him half-way. It is not easy to conceive it possible for life to subsist in a form so nearly composed of mere skin and bone as that of M. de Voltaire. He complained of decrepitude (he was then 76) and said, He supposed I was anxious to form an idea of the figure of one walking after death. However, his eyes and whole countenance are still full of fire; and though so emaciated, a more lively expression cannot be imagined."

He then inquired after English news, and talked of our poets of the day.

"During this conversation, we approached the buildings that he was constructing near the road to his chateau. 'These,' said he, pointing to them, 'are the most innocent, and perhaps the most useful, of all my works.' I observed that he had other works, which were of far more extensive use, and would be much more durable, than those. He was so obliging as to show me several farm-houses that he had built, and the plans of others: after which I took my leave."

After a lapse of several more years we have another glimpse of him at the age of eighty-two. A clergyman named Sherlock, provided with an introduction, paid him a long morning visit, and dined with him next day. The patriarch's dress is thus described:—

"On the two days I saw him, he wore white cloth shoes, white woollen stockings, red breeches, with a nightgown and waistcoat of blue linen, flowered, and lined with yellow. He had on a grizzled wig with three ties, and over it a silk night-cap, embroidered with gold and silver."

As we learn from other authority that he was in the habit of driving out in a carriage adorned with gold stars on a blue ground, and with carved and gilded mountings, few philosophers, in any age, when taking the air, could have presented a more splendid appearance. But to return to Mr Sherlock :—

"He met me in the hall; his nephew, M. d'Hornoi, Counsellor in the Parliament of Paris, held him by the arm. He said to me, with a very weak voice, 'You see a very old man, who makes a great effort to have the honour of seeing you. Will you take a walk in my garden? It will please you, for it is in the English taste; it was I who introduced that taste into France, and it has become universal. But the French parody your gardens—they put your thirty acres into three.'

"From his gardens you see the Alps, the Lake, the city of Geneva and its environs, which are very pleasant. He said, 'It is a beautiful prospect.' He pronounced these words tolerably well. *Sherlock*—'How long is it since you were in England?' *Voltaire*—'Fifty years, at least.' We then talked of literature; and from that moment he forgot his age and infirmities, and spoke with the warmth of a man of thirty. He said some shocking things against Moses and against Shakespeare. . . .

"*D'Hornoi*—'There, Monsieur, is a village which M. de Voltaire has built.' *Voltaire*—'Yes, we have our freedom here. Cut off a little corner and we are out of France. I asked some privileges for my children here, and the king' (or rather Voltaire's friend, Turgot, then finance minister) 'has granted me all that I asked, and has declared the Pays de Gex exempt from all taxes of the Farmer-General; so that salt, which formerly sold for ten sous a pound, now sells for four. I have nothing more to ask, except to live.'

"The next day as we sat down to dinner, he said in English, tolerably pronounced, 'We are here for liberty and property!

'This gentleman, whom let me present to Monsieur Sherlock, is a Jesuit—he wears his hat; I am a poor invalid—I wear my nightcap.'

In the course of dinner, Mr Sherlock asked how he had found *la chère Anglaise?*—which may be translated either "the English fare," or "the dear Englishwoman." The reverend gentleman's question of course related to the diet; but the gay Voltaire, taking it mischievously in the other sense, replied, "I found her very fresh and white."

"Many subjects were talked of pleasantly, English and French; and Voltaire remarked, 'When I see an Englishman subtle and fond of lawsuits, I say, "There is a Norman, who came in with William the Conqueror;" when I see a man good-natured and polite, "That is one who came with the Plantagenets;" a brutal character, "That is a Dane:" for your nation, Monsieur, as well as your language, is a medley of many others.'

"After dinner, passing through a little parlour, he took me by the arm and stopped me. 'Do you know this bust?' (of Sir Isaac Newton.) 'It is the greatest genius that ever existed. If all the geniuses of the universe were assembled, he should lead the band.'

"It was of Newton, and of his own works, that M. de Voltaire always spoke with the greatest warmth."

Not only did work of a cast suited to the gravity of age continue to occupy the last years of his long life, but those lighter pieces, products of the exuberant fertility and impulsive fancy which are the attributes of youth, were as numerous as ever. Only they took a deeper tone, and one always deepening as he consciously drew nearer and nearer to that close which for him, steadfastly gazing on it, was wrapt in impenetrable

darkness. In the end of 1773 he wrote the following stanzas, erroneously headed in his works as "to Madame du Deffant;" they were indeed sent to her for perusal, but were addressed to some lady still possessed of so much youth and beauty as to render the case of the Delia of the poem applicable to herself :—

"You wonder how time ne'er subdues
(Tho' eighty years have left their chill)
My superannuated muse,
That hums a quavering measure still.

In wintry wolds a tuft of bloom
Will sometimes thro' the snow-drifts smile,
Consoling nature in her gloom,
But withering in a little while.

A bird will trill a chirping note,
Tho' summer's leaves and light be o'er,
But melody forsakes his throat—
He sings the song of love no more.

'Tis thus I still my harp entune,
Whose strings no more my touch obey;
'Tis thus I lift my voice, tho' soon
That voice will silent be for aye.

Tibullus to his mistress said—
'I would thus breathe my last adieu,
My eyes still with your glances fed,
My dying hand caressing you.'

But when this world grows all remote,
When with the life the soul must go,
Can yet the eye on Delia[1] dote?
The hand a lover's touch bestow?

[1] Delia was the name of Tibullus's mistress.

Death changes, as we pass his gate,
What in our days of strength we knew:
Who would with joy anticipate
At his last gasp love's rendezvous?

And Delia, in her turn, no less
Must pass into eternal night,
Oblivious of her loveliness,
Oblivious of her youth's delight.

We enter life, we play our part,
We die—nor learn the reason here;
From out the unknown void we start,
And whither bound?—God knows, my dear."

It seems likely that the extraordinary old man might have continued for some years to enjoy his work and his comforts at Ferney, but for an unlucky visit to Paris in 1778. His niece, Madame Denis, had lived with him ever since he had been in the neighbourhood of Geneva; a short, fat woman, vulgar, unfeeling, extravagant, and very fond of gaiety. Notwithstanding that she had never been handsome, and was far from young, she spent so much time at her toilette that Voltaire seldom saw her till dinner; she was very grasping and exacting, very anxious that nobody should obtain any influence over him, and quarrelled with all his secretaries; in fact, seems to have devoted herself generally to promote his unhappiness. Voltaire, who, though in some respects irritable, was in many ways exceptionally indulgent, humoured her, even praised and flattered her, indemnifying himself occasionally with a little ridicule. It occurred to this lady, then about sixty-six, that her residence at Ferney was rather dull, and that Parisian life was much better suited to her style and temperament.

Full of this idea she began to manœuvre for its realisation. Voltaire had a new tragedy about to appear; she tried to persuade him that it never would receive justice unless he should superintend its production on the stage: other arguments were used and persisted in, until the poor old man was brought reluctantly to consent. Immediately on entering Paris he received a shock in the news that his friend Le Kain, the actor, had been buried the day before. As soon as his arrival was known, vast numbers of visitors poured in to pay their respects to him; all Paris was delighted except the Court and the clergy—and the expected displeasure of these, of which signs appeared, caused him much anxiety. In the midst of all this excitement he was engaged in completing still another new tragedy ("Agathocle"), and also his part of a French dictionary which he had planned, and of which he had taken the letter A for his share. Benjamin Franklin came to see him, bringing his grandson, whom he desired to kneel for the patriarch's blessing. Pronouncing in English the words, "God, liberty, tolerance," "this," said Voltaire, "is the most suitable benediction for the grandson of Franklin." A still more notable interview was that with the Marquise de Gouvernet, the Suzanne de Livry of yore, now a widow. Again he appeared at the doors of that hotel, his repulse from which had produced, as rejoinder, the poem, "Les Vous et les Tu." It was like the meeting of two ghosts in another world when the aged pair, both past eighty-four, tottered towards each other, trying in vain to reconcile what they beheld with what they remembered; while from the wall, Voltaire's portrait, preserved by the Marquise for sixty years, looked down with that mocking smile

which was not an irrelevant commentary. He came home greatly agitated from this interview. "I am returning," he said, "from one bank of the Styx to the other." The next day the Marquise sent back his portrait;[1] and the day after his death she, too, descended to the grave.

A fortnight after he came to Paris the unwonted excitement he had undergone brought on a dangerous attack of hæmorrhage from the lungs. Mindful of the fate of his friend Adrienne le Couvreur, he expressed piteously his wish that his body should not be cast into the highway; and, in the hope of averting that doom, confessed to a priest, and signed a paper asking pardon if he had offended the Church. A day or two afterwards his secretary, being alone with him, begged him to state exactly what his views still continued to be at a time when he believed himself dying; and received this written declaration: "I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition.—Voltaire."

From this attack, however, he so far recovered that, a month later, he was present at the representation of his new tragedy "Irène," when his costume was well calculated to do honour to that or any other occasion, rivalling in splendour that which he wore at Ferney:—

"He had made a grand toilet; he wore a red velvet coat trimmed with ermine, a large perruque of the time of Louis XIV., black and unpowdered, and in which his meagre face was so buried that only his eyes could be seen, which seemed

[1] It came, with Ferney, into the possession of the Marquis de Villette; and at the death of the last possessor of that title was sold, some years ago, for about £250.

to emit sparks. His head was surmounted with a square, red cap, in form of a crown. He had in his hand a little cane, with a top like a crow's beak."

It was a moment of extraordinary triumph for the returned exile. The whole theatre rose to receive him amidst long-continued applause; between the pieces his bust was crowned with laurel on the stage by the entire company; verses were recited in his honour; he was carried to his coach on the shoulders of his admirers, and attended to his hotel by an immense concourse. Turning on the steps, he said, "You wish, then, to stifle me with roses!"—and entered the house, which he did not quit again. He bore his last grievous illness with fortitude, and, on the 30th May 1778, met death with equanimity. But he was not held to have duly made the *amende honorable* to the Church, and the clergy of Paris denied him sepulture. His body, embalmed, was taken by his nephew, the Abbé Mignot, to the Abbey of Scellières in Champagne, and there interred with the rites of the Church. Next day a mandate arrived from the bishop of the diocese to forbid the burial, but the prohibition was then ineffectual.

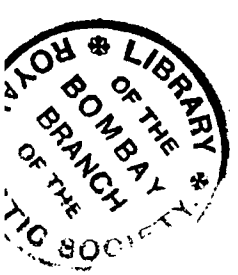
Thirteen years afterwards the Revolutionists, claiming in him a champion of their cause, took up his body and transported it to the Pantheon, to lie among those whom they judged worthy of honour. But his companions there were men whose doctrines and practice would, in life, have revolted him. Beside him was laid the wretch Marat, whom he would have loathed and denounced. The violent overturning of the old monarchy, the proscriptions, the massacres, the guillotine—these would have received no countenance from him,

and found no warrant in his writings, which had always inculcated those principles of toleration and justice that were no more respected by the Revolutionary Government than by the despotism which it destroyed.

In spite of this—in spite, too, of the fact that he had never been an assailant of the system of the monarchy—writers have gone on, down to this time, repeating, some in praise, some in blame, that he was a chief author of the Revolution. It is a matter impossible either of proof or of disproof; it must rest rather on opinion than evidence. What is more apparent is, that when a people have been so long and grievously misgoverned and oppressed, and find their relations with the Government so changed as they were when Louis XVI. and the people's representatives assumed towards each other such novel attitudes, the impending convulsion is not so much to be ascribed to the influence of this or that man, as to the constant accumulation of destructive force on the one side, and the constant diminution of repressive power on the other.

However this may be, it is chiefly as a literary phenomenon that Voltaire is now interesting to us. In that light it appears to the present writer that no inconsiderable part of his extraordinary fame was owing to the circumstances of the period, and the conditions in which he wrote, and has reasonably vanished with the lapse of time. That he still retains so eminent a position in France is due, in great measure, to those gifts of expression which do not much aid in extending a writer's reputation beyond his own country. But, after the winnowings of generations, a wide and deep repute still remains to him; nor will any diminution which it

may have suffered be without compensation, for, with the fading of old prejudices, and with better knowledge, his name will be regarded with increased liking and respect. Yet it must not be supposed that he is here held up as a pattern man. He was, indeed, an infinitely better one than the religious bigots of the time. He believed, with far better effect on his practice than they could boast, in a Supreme Ruler. He was the untiring and eloquent advocate, at the bar of the Universe, of the rights of humanity. He recognised and lamented all the evils permitted by Providence. But he forgot, except sometimes in theory, to return thanks for the blessings which are showered along with those evils on the earth, and thus the great intellect and the high purpose are left without the crowning grace of reverence.



END OF VOLTAIRE.

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